SUNWARD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FICTION

Forward from Babylon

Seacoast of Bohemia

VERSE

Sorrow of War

Shepherd Singing Ragtime

Prophet and Fool

SUNWARD

BY

LOUIS GOLDING

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Οὐχ ἁμῖν τὰ καλὰ πράτοις καλὰ φαίνεται εἶμεν,
Οἳ θνατοὶ πελόμεσθα, τὸ δ' αὔριον οὐκ ἐσορῶμες

THEOCRITUS

Πολλὰ δ'ἀνάριθμα
Ποτήρια καλαίφις

SAPPHO

TO
ISRAEL ZANGWILL
GRATEFULLY LOYALLY
& (REMEMBERING HIS
ITALIAN FANTASIES)
TIMIDLY

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PART I

SEAWARD

CHAPTER ONE

BOLZANO — RIVA

I

I HAD for so many months hugged the chilly bosoms of glaciers and topped the iciest of Austrian mountains that, having attained Italy, a nefarious idea scowled at me from the corners of my room in Bozen (or call it Bolzano, as your Central European sympathies direct). I should—oh, nothing less—I should sleep with my window shut that night. I fell back against my bed-post as Herostratus may have done when the idea first came to him of burning down the Artemision. But I would go further. I would resolutely eat nothing that was good for me for seven days and seven nights. I would eschew the sapless virtuousness of milk, the prurient self-righteousness of eggs. A vision came to me of my hill-top lodging at Innsbruck, windows for walls, windows for roof, windows almost for very floor, innumerable eggs pallidly jostling each other for my sickened favour, basins of cream frothing with their own meritoriousness. Away ! away ! Italian sun and Sicilian fennel were to be my provender now. For the present, shut that window ! Carefully I looked down along the landing, under the bed, in the wardrobe. None held watch upon me. Click went the window-latches. Never in my life I felt more magnificently wicked. . . .

There are people of intelligence who come over to Europe to get on intimate terms, they say, with Europeans. And they travel second on the railways, they travel first even. They stay in ' comfortable ' hotels—the least common denominator of Western civilization.

From these aridities my purse and my most solemn intent deliver me ! I should have missed the suave smuggler on the train that day who had travelled from Munich through Innsbruck to Bolzano. Small and smooth he was and had most gentle eyes. Though an Italian, he had been forced to fight for Austria during the War. The War attaining its unhappy climax, he was duly expelled to Italy as a *welsher*. In Italy, *non possono vederlo*, he told me, because he had fought for the enemy—they couldn't hold him in their eyes. What would you ? His days and nights were one perpetual sacrament of smugglery. That was his attitude towards his present occupation. When the Austrian was uppermost in him, *nieder mit den verpfluchten Italienern !* When the Italian —M Austria !

An interesting sign, this flattened inverted doubleyou of malediction, grim reversal of that upright doubleyou that cries lyrically—*Evviva !* You will see it stiffened into the powdery snow of a Vorarlberg Alp by a sudden frost, scratched viciously into the wall of the dead city of Paestum. In Bavaria it generally prefaces some kindly remark concerning Jews. In Italy once it actually preceded the sacrosanct name of Mussolini. But fortunately the local Fascist militia heard in time of the *lèse-majesté*. Armed with large jars of castor oil, you saw them scatter across the country-side, their fez-tassels shaking ominously. But this was long before that official prohibition of the beverage, which caused a certain ill-feeling among the loyal body of black-shirts who are by profession pharmaceutical chemists.

But to my Austrian-Italian smuggler. It is difficult

to suppress the feeling that one or two of the mid-European states were in league with him. The railway carriage at his side seemed to have been fitted up for his convenience. At all events, there were large sliding panels, as far as I could see, fitted into the woodwork ; he had cunningly removed overnight all the bolts and screws of that section of the train when the train stood in some remote siding. When we reached Bolzano, he drew forth parcel after tissue-papered parcel containing every manner of dutiable and desirable silk and satin. The gentle eyes burned with apocalyptic lights. Altogether an attractive smuggler. Very different from his Greek kinsman I met in the boat proceeding to Salonica from Marseilles. He was a law-student at Geneva returning to Greece to condole with his father, whom a wandering Zeppelin (how primordial the name and the thing sound now !) had maltreated. The young man took me ashore at the Piraeus, led me to a small flat-roofed house not far from the Piraeus, and to my alarm, proceeded to undress. Down slipped coat and waistcoat. Trousers followed. I looked anxiously towards the door. But he bade me be of good cheer. Nothing more alarming than that his whole body was tighter swathed round with wrappings of cloth than any Egyptian mummy. Then a companion took a hand, held one end of the material, and the young man stood in the centre of the room and proceeded to rotate violently on his axis. The air was full of flapping folds of cloth. Then he asked me how many metres would I care to buy, cheap, dirt cheap. . . .

Then there were the two ladies with pale golden hair on my Innsbruck-Bolzano train. They were Letts, I

gathered, and equally well disposed to the most irreconcilable nationals. The hatred of the Czechs for the Germans, of the Yugo-Slavs for each other, of the Hungarians for all, did not embarrass them. There was no European language in which they could not—and did not—say, 'Kiss me, my dear.' The sunset flare of the Brenner snows falling upon their tired faces made them curiously pathetic. They fell asleep on each other's shoulders with a mingling of their dyed laborious hair. Babyish they became, their lower lips pouted like the lips of children smacked and sent off early to bed. In the very height of their slumber, they subconsciously realized they were not adequately exposing their very shapely legs. Their two hands moved as if animated by one set of nerves, and the two skirts were lifted automatically knee-high. Then they sighed softly, and the German chemist from Frankfort sighed in response. An isolated peak and another and another flickered like dying torches of carnival, enaureoled with that shimmering rosy glory which the Munich school of romantic painters converts into the semblance of raspberry blancmange. The busy noises of our train made only the more stupendous that white trancedness about us. Gentle little smuggler, pale little Lettish ladies, to what burning lands do we speed through these dusking snows! There are to be the purple fields of comfrey in that vast temple of Hercules at Girgenti, and the flanks of the grotto against the island of Isca that bleed coral; there is the embrace of Aeolian waters about my limbs, what time Don Bernardo slays the white kid and pours his volcanic wine into slim flasks; and there is that day which was all one

anemone, and a brass moon and a bronze moon that tilted in yellow fields of tourney. . . . No, I must tell it at once. . . .

That closed window. . . . I am doomed to a life of rigid hygienic virtue. Doctor Saleeby will approve of me. I will eat eggs. I will drink milk. For at most dead night, the moon shining on the Porphyry Mountains, needs must I rise from my bed, and fling the window open to its widest possible. Beaten, I slunk back between the sheets again. I was not born for villainies.

Politically the scene has changed. But who can be convinced that he has left the Germanic Tirol? Least of all in the robustious *weinstube* called the Torrglhaus. The broad-stomached men sit about me, hefty flagons in hand, and on the table before them these absurdly unplayable playing-cards marked with bell, acorn, heart, and leaf. One not wholly sober guest calls loudly and frequently into space, then roars with laughter at the thought of his own loud frequency. A lady turns her back upon her husband because of his flirtation with the barmaid. Her wet eyes settle filmily upon mine and into my ears she pours the long tale of his infidelities. True to my determination to eat and drink nothing that is good for me, I sip my Swedish punch, but in a mood of mingled embarrassment and terror. The husband glares towards me as if I, forsooth, were alienating his wife's loyalty; his dislike for me grows the more intense the more his arm embraces of the rose-pink barmaid. The zither twanging under the fingers of the shaggy-haired musician creates a diversion. The husband glares with utmost animosity towards the zither. And I, leaving

the hapless wife to find a more gallant sympathizer, make my way into the quiet city.

So my feet echoed under the dark arcades of the Laubengasse until I found myself at length on the rim of the rocky river. I have never arrived in a city at howsoever late an hour but I have felt impelled to make the acquaintance of her river before accepting the hospitality of her roofs. Mountains are the mere anatomy of a country, rivers are her life-blood. And under a city's bridges you hear her heart tolling. It was a German heart that beat under the bridges of Bozen, let scraps of Versailles paper say what they will. At the railway-buffet, yes, the menu will translate for you, if it can, *Kalb'sschlögel* and *Paprikahend'l*; but the *Speisekarte* of the Torrglhaus was stalwartly monolingual. And here among the rocks and pebbles of this shadowy river, distinctly you heard guttural g's and ch's, howsoever the local education authorities might endeavour to suppress them in the throats of the stocky fair-haired youngsters who played on these banks their obstinately Germanic games.

Next morning on fantastic fingery Dolomite peaks the sun stretched a woof of fiery thread. But looking southward from Wirgl, the plateau above the town, I saw the country taking unto itself that rich garment of golden-brown as of lions padding through tawny lands, that colour which is distinctive of Italy, in her landscape, her paintings, and the eyes of her peasants. You will find it no less in Palma Vecchio than in Antonello da Messina, and the eyes of ploughmen from Friuli as in the eyes of grim sulphur miners leaning against bare walls of Caltanisetta.

Which is, I suppose, the purest self-deception. Con-

vince yourself that a profound subaqueous green is the distinctive note of Italian painting, and you will find confirmation all the way between Duccio Buonsignori and the Carracci. Or that painting is not Italian without a note of the blue in doves' wings, the yellow of the sun shining through upland broom, the sombre red of wine from Locri, and you will find them all. Italian painting embraces the whole gamut of colour, until she turns away from 'tango' impotently, her eyes blinking.

Entraining from Bolzano to Riva, you change at the small junction of Mori and proceed for a distance in the traces of the Austrian-Italian front. Every barn and cottage is spattered with shell-holes, in a manner which here seems peculiarly insensate. What did those shriekings and fumes in the calm loveliness of this valley? The church-towers still stare dizzily across the bare vines, as if they had not recovered from their buffeting. I saw a neat hole punched into the wall of a pigsty, almost heard the squealing of its shocked inhabitants. Only now, as then, the Lago di Loppio spreads out his cloth of gold under the royal feet of the hills.

Riva was my threshold of the sun. All the fierce white light which burned for me across Italy came pouring in first floods from the Torre Apponale and almost set its bells ringing, so fiercely and urgently the light surged about its proud grey head. Light rolled northward along the waters of the Lake of Garda and flooded the harbour till every sail of the fishing-boats was translucent and looked less like canvas than a bird's wing against the sun. Here was January, here was northmost Italy, yet not then, not ever when rain came torrentially

down upon the cliffs of Capri, nor when Etna gathered mists about him, threatening a more sombre garment; not anywhere in the stillest pause of night, was I not aware of the sun, like a multitude of horses champing and tossing their manes, beyond the gates of darkness or teeming cloud. Riva, microcosm of Italy, her quay, her square, her battlemented palaces; a hundred thousand miles from Vienna, and those young Austrians perched aloft in that end-of-the-world darkness of the snow blizzard . . . of them at once.

The emotion of nationalism can be the most comical, even though it has led to the most tragical of results, in the human composition. Comical, I mean, in the extreme of its humourlessness, its blissful lack of all perspective, historical or psychological or any other. This supreme Italianism of Riva puts the thought into my mind of the young Austrian firebrands with whom I ate *Kaiserschmarrn* from one vast communal frying-pan, in the ski-hut of the Fotscherthal. Without, the blizzard piled the snow-drifts higher and higher about our windows. Icicles hung from the eaves of the roof like the teeth of some gigantic antediluvian monster. The air within-doors was yellow with wood smoke and with that transfusion of sulphurous light which invests the mountain-tops when the sky has ceased to exist, being nothing more than one perpetual, unhurried, inexhaustible flurry of snow. Until, indifferently, the flakes drift upward or horizontally or obliquely, as if the firmament which long ago had been established has been confounded again, and there is neither earth nor heaven, but snow only, the essence of things, their first and last.

(How much the more therefore, did Italian sun scorch me, blazing down into my blood against a background of the mist and snow of Central Europe, matter and spirit.)

Yes, the young Austrians agreed, we accept the League of Nations, Universal Disarmament, the Abomination of War. But, of course, Italy. . . .

I (*interestedly*). Yes, Italy ?

THEY. War to the death with Italy.

I. But you 've just agreed . . . war . . . abominable.

THEY. Of course, we 're Pacifists, we in Austria. But we 're going to fight for our Sud-Tirol. You 've been to Bozen ?

I. No. Soon, I hope.

THEY. Well, you 'll see for yourself there 's no town more German in all Austria-Germany. Why have they stolen it from us ? They 're closing our schools. If you don't speak their feeble effeminate language. . . .

I (*loudly*). I know, I know. I 've heard the same tale in Germany about Czecho-Slovakia, and Czecho-Slovakia about Germany. In Hungary about no other people than your worthy selves. What about Burgenland, my friends ?

THEY (*in chorus, remembering the Great War*).

Nach Cadorna's Braten geht unser Sonntag's Wunsch
Aus Alpinibiut da brauen wir uns Punsch.
Bersaglierigeröste kochen wir geschwind
Und zum Abendessen ein faschiertes Kind.
Hei tschinderaba, bunderaba, Revolution,
Revoluti-revoluti-revolution.

The anthropophagous *hacken-kreuzleresque* Duke of

Northumberland sentiment of the verses does not seem to me to find an appropriate finale in the refrain. That didn't matter. Not at Bozen. Nor as I sat in the Torrlghaus, and the vowels familiar and flat and friendly of Tirolese German boomed across the foam of beer. I too became a Tirolese Irredentist. I too yearned for a dish of Alpiniblut. The verses came to my lips again :

Bersaglierigeröste kochen wir geschwind
Und zum Abendessen ein faschiertes Kind.

Yes, my dear firebrands, yes. But what of Italian Riva, what of the Pretorian Palace of the Scaligers in your imperial hands a whole guttural century ? You forget 1815. And you, d'Annunzio and Mussolini, why stop short at Bolzano ? Berlin is just as Italian, perhaps even a little more. Oh the humours of nationalism ! Fair goddess of nitro-glycerine, be kind to us !

II

That evening I climbed from Riva to follow the southward road along the lake. All earth and air was subtilized into a blue immanence, as if great trailers of wisteria were suspended between them and each blossom were itself a lamp, palely glowing. Higher and higher climbed the road against the foreheads of the promontories, and ever fainter and fainter washed the water among the rocks at the edge of the precipices. Lights began to bloom upon the banks. The lanterns in passing boats trailed over the quiet dimness. Garda, Derwentwater. . . .

God give me Derwentwater when I die.

So I prayed long ago. There was to be no one by me to

close my eye (thus reduced to forlorn singularity by the exigency of a sigh three lines later). On Friar's Crag my body was to lie down, on green grass and earth brown. But let d'Annunzio of Garda whisper phantasmal nothings into Wordsworth's ear, and the Virgin among the rocks take Lucy Grey into her lap and tell of lemon-groves.

Then suddenly I found myself in a cement redoubt built under the lee of a high rock. Looking out through its narrow aperture, it seemed as one might look along the barrel of a revolver. Headland beyond headland stretched Italy away, most desired of lands. Rusty barbed wire tangled my feet. Behind me, far and far away, rose the abashed white peaks of Austria. Grotesque beyond language, this jealous eye chipped in the stone, this barbed-wire cumbering the vines. And Riva had taken to herself a skiey constellation of fallen lights. A boat moved into her harbour. When you saw her light she was invisible in the faint halo of it. When she turned her light away, once more her narrow bulk was outlined against the dark.

O bare, O blue, and dim with dew,
The world beneath her beauty lies ;
There is no grace so strange as you,
O silver hoofs, O amber eyes !

So sings a modern poet of a dawn in one of his own enchanted lands, Shipscar or Cumberland. It might have been no less justly the very breath and utterance of my Garda dusk. There are moments when we know time greater than the divisions our senses and our frailty set upon him, when he is not night nor noon, one day nor

another day. Such a moment was it that mixed for me as in a phial the waters of Derwentwater and Garda, and melted the bluff shoulders of Cumberland hills against the Giudicarian precipices.

From what water came that seagull about our smoky funnel when next morning we steamed out into the lake? Had I not seen her before? Was I not destined to see her again? All day she hung about us, making bright tangents across the sun or using her wing-tip as a pivot round which all the sky revolved. As for the plates of fruit the steward brought me, apples and oranges and nuts, nuts and oranges and apples . . . it must have been the orange and lemon-groves on the western bank, darkening and brightening among the white pillars, that produced my misconception. If lemons and oranges were in fruit at the top of Italy in mid January, how was not our hold bursting with heaped fruit garnered from the whole Italian year? And any quantity of it surely at some inclusive price that varied not whether you cracked a nut or peeled an orchard. I fell into a gentle rhythm of orange and apple and nut, nut and orange and apple, all day long. As we approached and receded from the tiny lake-side towns, shipped and unshipped their peasants, steamed from ochreous cliff to emerald meadow, the paler and paler steward, slipping into the compulsion of this rhythm, supplied me silently with apple and orange and nut, nut and apple and orange. No shadow of the laboriously detailed account that the steward that evening was to present to me disturbed my mood of apostrophe to the dipping and soaring gull. Nor no memory of the large lady from Yorkshire whom I beheld once in the

railway restaurant of Marseilles polishing off dish after dish of the fifteen dishes of *hors-d'œuvre* laid before her, that she might achieve her money's worth, livid and livider as she attained the tenth dish, the eleventh, but never one moment lowering her flag. Not a sprat she spared, not a slice of tomato, not a grain of herring-roe. And I no nut, no orange, no apple. And all day long the seagull soaring and dipping, and I weaving verses . . .

O bird,
So lovely,
Bird with shining wings,
Wind knows you lovely,
Hence about your feet she clings,
Hence she holds your wings outspread
On her bosom as a bed.

In the morning you are but
Cloud and light embodied, shut
By the flimsiest barriers
From your late engendering airs.
Against the concave bronze of noon
You are silent as Death is.
Then are your wings that danced
In a sombre spell entranced.
—But when the deeps with stars are strewn
You do transcend their mysteries.

O bird,
So lovely,
Bird with ardent head,
At the altar of your heart
Earth and stars are wed.

Listen before the deep clouds close !
From those sphery citadels,
Falls a noise of bridal bells.
Down the steep stairs the music goes,
Like a flock of snowflakes drifting towards a downy bank of snows.

We are arrived at length at Desenzano, whence the train carries you to Verona, to the purple twilight of Verona, the bats squeaking in the thin air. No, not yet. Why does the harbour-side crowd of Sulo gather about the man who holds a fox nuzzling into his waistcoat ? And all these carabinieri and fascisti, the guardia municipale, the bersaglieri, alpini, why do they expostulate with him ? And why does he smile into their faces darkly ? Is it because he has a fox ? Is it because he has not two ? Rust-red palm-plume tail, what would they have of you ? Are they too a little drunk with the beauty of sails reflected in water ? Here where they lose the imperfection of texture, transmute base canvas into a substance more burning than gold, more inapprehensible than water ?

There rise towers and battlements. There is the Campanile of San Zeno. The Christ stares at you dreadfully there with grim eyes. His Apostles have no kindly word to say. The negroid bishop who gave the church its name dangles his fish agelessly. But beyond those bronze doors the purple twilight of Verona—Verona again !

CHAPTER TWO

VERONA — VICENZA

I

THERE was a peasant in the carriage at Desenzano. His eyes were like agate. There was slow flame in them. His eyebrows, having moved to their predestined termini, turned back on their tracks again. It was like travelling with a leopard. Ripples of sleepy energy coursed under his skin as he moved thigh or neck. Once, indeed, a youth I knew travelled from Aldershot to London with a young leopard which had been the darling of his mess. It was the period of the War when every railway carriage in England was packed with successive tiers of passengers. But my friend and the leopard found none to share their carriage with them. I almost looked to my Lombard peasant to stretch forth a spotted paw and pull the flesh playfully down from between my shoulder knot and elbow. He did no more than extract a vitreous cylinder of salame and tear its skin with pointed white teeth. The flame in the agate eyes smouldered.

I was in Verona a year ago, little guessing I should soon wander this way again under the pinnacled beauty of the Scaliger tombs. How little we knew Verona who knew her bright self only, for there was mist beyond the city and we saw not then how her mountains relate her pageant of many-coloured glass to the white radiance of their own eternity. Without her incomparable background of Alps, the half herself is she . . . yet the tithe of her worth how many other cities a hundredfold !

I stood in a piazza—I cannot recall its name nor the

palaces that lined it—admiring the faultless proportions of a marble stairway at its corner, the relation of its width to the height of each step and the height of its columned balustrade, when a sound issued from a dark archway into the throbbing light that pulsed about me. It was only when I saw the thin hands of the old woman who was responsible for the sound brushing away from her cheeks her large continuous tears, that I realized it was the sound of crying. It is impossible to conceive crying so utterly void of any suggestion of melancholy. It was passionless, like the noise of leaves, or like an infant whose wailing is a natural reflex, unrelated with pain or desire. Had I swung a rattle before that old woman on the piazza at Verona, she would have forgotten she was crying to stare at me and hold out her arms for the toy. And I heard another old woman in Linz, a cloudy city of Upper Austria where the Danube narrows towards the 'castled steeps' of the Wachau. Her youngest son had been absorbed into Siberia during the War and was not heard of again. Two of her grandsons sat in the same room with us, each minus an arm and leg. It was a curiously grim symmetry, as if some Parrhasian artist had carved them to fit into some monstrous unhuman composition. The fighting on the Carso plateau, I think, had been the artificer. The old woman had been talking evenly enough of some household matter. No fresh interest had been introduced into the room or our conversation. Suddenly I was aware the old woman was crying, but crying so that you felt the force of it must check her heart's last frail beatings. It was terrible, because there was a freshness and urgency in the sound, like a young girl

sobbing after finding her lover faithless. It was terrible, because neither her grandsons nor her daughter, their mother, made the least effort to talk her out of it. It was most terrible of all because I felt that this crying was the true order of her life, the rest of it a mere interlude between tears and tears.

The old woman of Verona hobbled past me out of the square. I had slipped a few liras into her hand—nickel liras, you must understand. The germiferous paper liras would have had less efficacy—not because of the germs they carry, but because they do not make a noise and do not shine in the sun. She bent her sharp nose down towards the coins and jingled them together, then passed out of my sight, crowing.

The arena at Arles and the ruin of its ancient theatre and its river foaming by, too swiftly to catch even a kerchief's width of the sky's blue wilderness, all these were recalled to me by arena and theatre and river of Verona. Yet despite these resemblances the thought of Arles persisted all that day because the two cities affected me, though each no less powerfully than the other, in wholly opposite ways.

Arles is a place wholly of echoes. There are no substantial sounds in that city by the Rhône. You felt that the women bought and sold loaves of bread like witches bartering herbs for incantations and the pale wise children played with marbles like old men in the woods of Faery playing with men's souls. Arthur Symons said truly of Arles that it is an autumn city. The first buds on the hedgerows before they burst into flower are already heavy with memories. And the snow that falls

elsewhere in the Midi is snow, but it is not snow in Arles. It is a funeral toga over a dead Roman city.

Verona is full of bright stridency. It is more natural to buy postcards of Angelo Malvicini—Recordman e Campione Italiano di Maratona (what Jupiter of nineteen years has since snatched the laurels from the brow of this grey Saturn, dispossessed and twenty-three ?)—than to chaffer for little packets of hellebore and nightshade. Arles, an autumn city, a city of dusk at dawning, Verona, a city of spring, a city of sunlight vibrating across her purple twilight and midnight of ebony.

I bought a clay flute in each of these cities. One day in Arles I stood in the market-place where a man in a pair of threadbare blue trousers and a faded red shirt hovered aimlessly over a table. A crowd drifted aimlessly round him, and I aimlessly joined the rest. '*Une harpe des dieux*,' he was saying, and his voice was like a wind in a rifted chimney, '*que j'ai trouvée moi-même dans les arènes. Deux sous, l'harpe avec le secret !*' Knowing the great things in life are of little price, and the greatest of no price at all, I bought the flute and its secret. (Why did he call it 'harp' ?) Hollowed clay it was, shaped like a revolver pouch, with the stops cut at mysterious intervals. Then the vendor of secrets taught us his music, and the sound was the echo of Arles—the echo of Roman splendour triumphant, Roman splendour waning in the barbarian twilight ; the echo of processional choristers in cathedrals deserted centuries ago. I went down to the river and placed my lips to the flute among the flowerless irises. It wheezed like an old man in a draught. There was no other mortal in Arles who could produce music

from that instrument save only the blue-trousered wizard. A restive crowd gathered in the market-place with their flutes next day, but he was not seen again. There arose a murmuring of grave doubts concerning him. One after another the folk crossed their breasts and threw the flutes away, till a broken heap of them gathered under a fig-tree, like the discarded idols of a tribe which has suddenly seen God. And in Verona, in the Piazza delle Erbe, I bought another flute at a stall protected from the sun by an umbrella spread over it like a cabbage-rose. In a jostling of pipes, candlesticks, jugs, plates, busts of Mussolini, all of unglazed clay like itself, its small blank eyes looked up to me. I took it down to the bank of the Adige where the women scour their laundry, and spread them on the hot boulders to dry. And I—who can sing the first four notes of 'God Save the King' only by going flat three times and sharp once, or sharp three times and flat once, for I hardly know the distinction between these two—played 'Giovinezza' perfectly, as if the special god of Fascismo were inspiring my flute and not my own poor breath.

Giovinezza, Giovinezza,
Primavera di bellezza,
Nel Fascismo è la salvezza
Della nostra libertà.

An uncomplex sentiment! Two or three husbands looking to the virtuous dispatch of their laundry rendered words to my melody. None of those comely washerwomen disputed our assertion, that in Fascismo lay the salvation of our liberty. Gradually the pace of their scrubbings and rinsings quickened. '*Giovinezza*' went

the soap. '*Primavera*' continued the scrubbing-brush. '*Della nostra libertà*'—and the last drop of Adige was squeezed from Pancrazio's pants and the white limpness of Peppina's First Communion frock. That was not the end of my Veronese flute. I placed it to my lips in Naples and forth issued a most complicated melody from Donizetti, my own eyes boggling with amazement. In Catania it was Bellini. (He at least is the local musician. They have a statue and gardens in his honour. Or it may have been a Latin canticle or the secret song of Mafia. I have already declared my ignorance in these matters.) And passing through Paris, it was none other than Debussy. . . . Hold! There will be sceptics. They will say—*let* them say! If they, too, will come with a soul unwarped by musical pride (for this is deadlier than pride of the intellect) to buy a Veronese flute from under the umbrellas of the Piazza delle Erbe, they, too, will pass from Palestrina to *Iolanthe*, from Bach to Mr. Herman Darewski, and the stone horses bestridden by the Scaligers will neigh faintly in response across the city, and the ghost of Juliet, perhaps, will join in the wizard music, for she haunts these streets. And if they can educe no sound from a clay flute of Verona, the sin of musical pride lies hard in their bosoms. There is no hope for them.

It is only when you enter the portals of San Zeno that you leave spring behind you. The Christ on the Choir Screen rises so grim and straight and rock-like that you feel you must measure his tale in geological rather than historic time. He has no knowledge of the Judaean carpenter who came long after him and took his name.

There is such awe in his uplifted hand that the gesture of Epstein's statue, pointing to the split palm, seems hardly more than theatrical. There are also stigmata on the hands and feet of the San Zeno Christ, but there is no especial demonstration of them. It is as if gods no less than men must bear wounds even as flame burns, and no murmur must pass from between godly or human lips. No painter could hang so justly behind this cold and terrible Christ as Mantegna. He has a Madonna and Saints here and a Holy Family in the Museo Civico. Both are sculptural and august in the same way as the Christ. There is vivid colour in the first painting as there must have been once on the hems of the sculptured Christ's robes, where traces of its early colouring still linger. But it is a memory of that rigid form you carry away with you into the world's fluent colour again.

II

It is not inappropriate that Vicenza is the birthplace of Mantegna—a city severe with style, with form, none of your out-moded Gothic glooms. How Ruskin must have hated Italy! (The suspicion will not be gainsaid.) Time after time he must have had to strangle his affections for a picture here, a building there, because the painter or sculptor did not achieve the tabulated quantity of moral virtue, or because the thing achieved did not fall within his programme of aesthetic commendation. With Palladio in Venice he is particularly fretful. I conclude because he had had to struggle so hard against the beauty of the Basilica Palladiana in Vicenza. Tell me not this synthetic architecture of Doric and Ionic forms is no

thing to worship because the Dorians and Ionians were dead when Palladio held out his charts before him to encircle the Palazzo della Ragione with this formal wizardry. Visit Vicenza when the moon transmutes the Basilica into a spectral substance and the two Venetian columns beyond it rise like the stems of celestial lilies.

I sat sipping my coffee and looking towards them, wondering whether their stalks swayed, as a cloud slipped like falling hair against the face of the moon. The clouds gathered and there was no moon. The lights were dimmed in the piazza, the waiter clicked his heels by the table. But my mind filled with the light and odour of two pictures I had seen earlier that day at Verona—in the place of those marble lilies two canvasses opened red and white petals like a rose-garden on a spring morning. They were by Stefano da Zevio, the *Vergine col Bambino* and the *Vergine del Roseto.* The Virgin's ermine cloak in the first describes a broad curve as of a bow about her arm and the Babe is her bow-string. Perhaps her long hand is intended to represent the arrow which the Babe some day should launch against the Mother's bosom. Two angels with coloured wings crown her meekness with a pride of gold and jewels and birds twitter under her feet and about her in dark branches. Most of these motives re-occur in the *Vergine del Roseto*, and here the Virgin's humility is her sufficient crown. Such a crown as eyes may see and hands touch is for St. Catharine wreathing a rose-garland below her, hard against the wheel of her martyrdom. All the trellis is shot through with the wings of angels acute as flames. A lovely quartette of red-clad and blue-clad Things (to use

an awed, hushed word of Francis Thompson) sit chanting over a missal as large as themselves. Peacocks suspend the burning cascades of their plumage. There are as many roses in the picture as stars over Suez, the Child himself like a tiny white bud, close-packed.

A picture at Vicenza by Marcello Fogolino enchanted me, but with a graver spell. An infant Christ is bound by red wings about a cross. He, a suckling almost, is already pierced by the stigmata. From each of these a line of red passion burns its way into the breast and limbs of St. Francis. It is a terrifying conception, this denial to the doomed Child of felicity even so soon. And no less potent, a vivid Adoration by the same painter ; behind the three kings follow processions of dwarfs and monkeys, elephants, cockatoos, any brilliant-feathered bird soever.

So much happier these than the caged songsters I saw on a sunny wall in the Piazza dei Signori, fluttering from side to side swiftly, hopelessly. Like a man bound against a pillar, and his eyes turn helplessly right and left, right and left. Or like a private in the Devons I saw long ago strapped to a wheel on an arid Macedonian upland. I see his eyes still, turning right and left, right and left, and hear his brown lips babbling, without his volition at all, the ballad of the Bells of Hell that

go ting-a-ling
For you but not for me.

But, to be precise, for both of us that abominable day.

Not this desolation nor any other could have withstood Giovanni Bellini's *Battesimo di Christo*, in the church of Santa Corona. Christ standing by the stream is put

together out of light rather than flesh. His mother and her two companions adoring on the stream's further side, are fresher than the sapling that trembles behind and above them. But if Christ has the light, it is St. John who has the magnificence. Through level after level of air he rises till his head touches the hills. The bowl of baptism is held aloft in the dying day and all the last light is suspended within it as in a prism which light can enter but not leave again. There are young men who will tell me that this bowl is the apex of a pyramid of high lights whereof the base is the reflections in the stream and the feet of Christ, and the slopes are John's limbs and the women's faces. Get you gone, young men ! Before that painter and another painter, I will listen to you, but before Giovanni Bellini let me stand with bowed head alone, as when first I read *Adonais*, or first saw snow on mountains in midsummer.

Let them divert the hosepipe of their theorizings towards Palladio's Teatro Olimpico, but not too publicly, because of the pride in it which inflates every Vicentino. A theatre in the antique mode, imitated by Palladio from his well-thumbed fifth book of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio's treatise on ' Architecture,' it combines all the demerits of the ancient and modern theatre. The art of scenic realism can no further go than it has gone in the three streets which converge upon the stage towards two square side-doors and a triumphal arch between them. The façades of the streets are made of painted wood and in a manner so diabolically skilful as to set Messrs. Cochran and Collins gnashing their teeth if they beheld it. An illusion of quite perfect perspective is produced. If

Palladio himself did not construct the stage, it was done to his plans by Scamozzi after his death. The place quite curiously outraged my sense of aesthetic decorum as many months before Rubens also had done in the Liechtenstein Palace in Vienna. There hang the six episodes from the life of Decius which the Genoese merchants had ordered from Rubens as models for tapestries to be executed at the Brussels factory. The discovery comes to you suddenly and shockingly that all these epic figures are left-handed, whether they are priests arranging sacrifices or warriors brandishing spears. Now, of course, there was no help for it. Tapestries must in the nature of their technique be copied from left-handed originals. But you feel yourself let down. Never had Rubens seemed more magnificently transported into an ecstasy of giant form and primal colour. Then you realize how mathematically he must have converted all his right-handed into left-handed values, a radical and persistent readjustment of all his natural plastic concepts.

It is absurd. He had a job to do and so had Palladio. And I suppose this monstrous unscrupulousness of genius can be cleverly interpreted as a sort of defiant integrity of the aesthetic will. After all Shelley rhyming is executing a lie, pretending to himself and you that God and not Shelley is responsible for that line-ending in 'fleeing'; that it was in no manner conditioned by the earlier phrase, 'thou breath of autumn's being.' And it would be easy to forget that beyond the dusty tiers of Palladio's theatre the sun, a golden horse, is charging across the blue plains. Eastward, I cried, for Venice, and then . . . then follows our adventure sunward, full tilt against the

golden horse, young man, whom Lancashire fogs suckled and Vicenzan speculation will not hold over long from Agerola and the anemones there that so unblushingly crowd from their decency of shade into the naked noon —eastward hence !

PADUA — VENICE

I

W. D. HOWELLS inveighs without discrimination against the race of colonnaded cities. The colonnades of Bologna, yes, as much malediction as you care to proclaim. Strip from Bologna her colonnades and you find her the vulgar bustling city she somehow has fundamentally become, despite a tradition how many cities in other countries would not sacrifice all their preference shares to acquire, despite Carducci and the literary renown he conferred on her. A city, as D. H. Lawrence would put it, that has lost its nodality. So have Rome and Venice, according to this same writer, and so has not a certain city in Mexico of which I had never heard before. The nodalities which Rome and Venice have lost cannot be so essential to their existence as Bologna's, for they remain cities not wholly without interest. Bologna does her best to remain interesting by straddling her colonnades all over the place, but you can see through them. You cannot, on the other hand, see through the colonnades of Padua. They and their city are inextricable. You have no difficulty in evoking gallant young Renaissance scholars from among these pillars of Padua, pretty dagger or sword at hip and feather in cap, tossing jauntily. In Bologna you cannot get beyond the sallow little students of electrical engineering and political economy.

The existence of such a shrine as Saint Anthony's spiritualizes a place for ever. All the gas-works of Brentford could not make Padua less holy. If ever a new deity, or the new agent of an old deity, invests this

place, or if men ever set up behind its altar a pair of compasses or any mathematical instrument to be the symbol of a scientific neo-paganism, Anthony's voice will still be the comfort of children and teach lovers how to find their pledges again. As for Bologna, she will manufacture her wireless sets, or whatever mechanism of that century makes thinking and feeling and seeing for oneself a ludicrous nuisance, and none will turn her mind from it.

Clanking down the colonnaded streets in heavily-mailed Tirolese mountain-boots, rucksack firm below the shoulders, I am attracted to the Croci Bianche because I learn regarding this hostelry that it is the resort of pilgrims. A bare, poor, cavernous place it is. The landlady looks at me suspiciously and demands where my party is. I have no party. Where then is my family? I have no family. Then they have no place for me, because they let their rooms to congregations only, not to individuals. My curiosity is piqued. I am ready to pay a congregational price despite my regrettable individualism. No. What if a party of pilgrims turn up suddenly from Michigan?

And at that moment a tall lady descended with a faint swishing of silk to the foot of the dark stairs. There were bracelets along her forearm and over her elbow, and rings burning about her hands. She wore a necklace that seemed of great price. Her hair was done in an antique mode and there was antiquity in the voluminous fall and fold of her dress. A pale lemon silk. You cannot conceive, I say, how bare and poor and cavernous a place is the Croci Bianche, and how much barer and poorer it seemed then. The expiation of what sin had she come to

achieve? A lady, was she, of what nobility? I shall never know. I found myself staring at a closed door. I heard the drawing of bolts within and the sun beating over my head against the blistered panels like clenched fists.

Another mysterious Paduan offered me his company in the Madonna dell' Arena, a polished young gentleman with black plastered hair and a slightly broken nose. So immaculate a gentleman was he that I could not refrain from paying the liras for his admission there and to the Eremitani near by, where are the frescoes of Andrea Mantegna. He had a lively mind. 'Would you not say,' he inquired regarding Giotto, 'that he makes much of subsequent Italian painting unnecessary?' An interesting point of view, and we played with it for a time. He pointed out refreshingly the dachshund-bellied sheep and the long-eared horses and with a faint leer the sly side-turned eyes of the High Priest in the Temple. Yes, a rather irreverent young man. The only figure actually represented as drinking in the Marriage at Cana was a fat friar, jolliest of his kind. The young man winked. The discomfort of Joseph. . . . 'It was always,' said he, 'too much for Joseph, from the beginning.' The young man gloated. He stroked the slightly broken nose. There were other matters which induced his careful ribaldry. . . .

And then he asked for a few centesimi for his next meal. I looked upon his impeccable clothing. I remembered his cultured cadences. I blushed furiously. Then I took myself firmly in hand:

'It was yourself who suggested accompanying me into the Arena and the Eremitani. I confess small knowledge

and a taste in its infancy. Poor things, but my own. Hence I make a practice of invariably going alone. . . .'

He leered again. But it was a leer of contempt, not of salaciousness, this time. 'Shall I return to you your liras of admission? Permit me.'

'No!' I cried brokenly.

He held out the palm of his hand as if conveying to me a privilege I was not worthy of. I placed some coins in it, with the sensation of doing dishonour to Italian art and to myself. The young man himself was immune from honour or dishonour. He turned on his heel and I saw him make straight as a die towards an office for the sale of National Lottery tickets.

There was more humility in the deportment of two working men and a working lad in St. Anthony's basilica. They had been blinded and scalded in some factory explosion. They carried an odour of chemicals about with them that fought strangely with the odour of incense. The boy had come off worst. He moved chin and cheek and brow against the Saint's tomb to find a patch of his face where the accident had wrought least violence. Every contact of the cool marble against his raw skin seemed to burn like hot metal. But still he moved chin and cheek forlornly like a melancholy horse nuzzling a gate. He whimpered. Around him shone the everlasting lamps. Behind him coldly gleamed the placid Renaissance marbles. I wondered if the owner of the factory where the explosion had taken place also came to lay his face against St. Anthony's tomb. He probably has more grievous wrongs to repair than his three workmen, for all their twitching skins and singed eyes.

They threaten to re-fresco the whitewashed walls of the basilica as they are driving out the mystery from the profound brick of Westminster by the expensive frippery of marbles. Where the choir-roof at Padua is painted over, at once the roof, that elsewhere strains to heaven, is brought flatly down to brood on the head. The inefficient modern painting squabbles with the exquisite detail of marble and bronze below. As, for instance, that most zestful storm by Bellano, contained in Donatello's marble screen, so zestful that the mind leaps to the first scene of *The Tempest* :

> *Down with the topmast ! Yare ! Lower, lower !*
> *Bring her to try with main-course !*

and is battered by the howl of waters.

The sunlight is too violent for the scalded working men. They creep along the streets homeward in the fringe of shadow and are swallowed up at length by the close jaws of the colonnades. What tragedies have not the colonnades of Padua before now concealed ! What lovers have not met in their embraces whom hostile families would keep apart ! What kissings and what stabbings, what traffic in bodies and souls ! If we could but interpret the meaning of the wind's whisperings when it wanders through these colonnades, into what cynics should we not be converted ! As cynical even, I wonder, as the young gentleman of the impeccable clothing for whom the State Lottery of Italy had so potent a fascination ?

I made my way to the Renaissance Church of Santa Giustina in the Square of Victor Emanuel. Now they could not have dared to plant these gimcrack busts of

eighty-two eminent Paduans before the heaped cupolas of the church dedicated to the most eminent of them all. The irascible Portuguese in him would have descended in blight and mildew upon them. In a season or two they would have been more lamentable than the Sheldonian busts. They are apt enough here, staring unperturbed upon the glacial Renaissance dullness of Santa Giustina. Just so assuredly at their ease were the cinema actors and photographers I saw mopping and mowing among the fountains in front of St. Peter's. It was as if they were conscious of a kinship between the church's art and their own—an art destined not for intense individual emotion but for the widest diffusion among the greatest possible number, an art of hollow and enormous effect, not of a still small voice speaking in the secret places.

At Santa Giustina I felt more than ever before the mausolean properties of Renaissance church-building. It treats the human body horizontally as if it were already packed away in a coffin. It is an art of exhumation rather than of re-birth. Gothic treats a man as vertical, heaven-aspiring. When the arch became round again, Christianity flattened from the acme of its spirit. Whereas the Renaissance destroyed the sanctity of Christian temples for ever (or until such time as an architecture so eloquent and so apt to its spirit as Gothic is once more evolved), it gave a new dignity to civic and domestic architecture. Man had become a lay creature again, having been for centuries a creature of God. He had built his own churches and they were beautiful. He now consigned them to the specialists, and what was there left for us? The architecture of the Church of Christ

Scientist in Sloane Terrace? And the purple limousines drawn up against its portals on Sunday mornings?

II

Who does not sing in Italy? It occurs to me that nobody I have met, man, woman, or child, senator or shoeblack, since I attained Riva, does not sing if left to his own resources for one moment only. It is no casual, semi-conscious occupation like the progressive ricochetting of a walking-stick against English garden-railings nor the sallow little Greek's telling of his toll of beads. The whole mind and body goes into it. Such virtuosity, such coloratura, such trillings as you never heard. There is nothing furtive about it. Both lungs are expanded broadly, and should your friend, whom you imagined dead in the Isonzo fighting, suddenly meet you as you pass from under the Torre dell' Orologio into the Merceria, you will both postpone your expressions of delighted recognition until such time as both of you have completed the airs you were respectively so lustily rendering.

Now in all lands errand-boys sing, when, at least, they are not whistling; and when errand-boys cease to make music, then indeed is woe to their land. There lay the grimmest evidence of Austria's and Germany's sorrow in the time of their nadir. The errand-boys there were silent as a canary left out in an April downpour, or at most, they were resolving in anxious whisperings problems that should not be troubling them for another ten years. But not only the errand-boys did not sing in Central Europe. The prima donnas in the vast houses of opera,

these also did not sing. If they could, they would have been in Cincinnati, where they might be paid in a more stable currency. I heard a blonde Carmen in the Hof-theater in Vienna. . . . Poor woman, the less remembered of her the better !

And walking down the Piazzetta I found myself in the traces of three Italian soldiers. They were not singing. I smote my ears and listened again. They were not singing. Italians, were they ? But, of course—the grey-green capes, the abominably fitting trousers, the atrocious shoe-leather. What did it mean, then ? What right had they not to be singing ? Sunlight on the Grand Canal, the Lord forgive me, lovelier than the Lord's own pavements. Clouds in the sky whiter-winged and fleeter than His own seraphim. But surely it is seraphim whose wings are red as flame, and cherubim that are winged with snow ? It may be—but that is no reason for your not singing, O grey-green-garmented soldiers of Italy !

Italy, indeed ! As Italian as Bozen ! They were Austrians from Sud-Tirol conscripted as neatly into the Italian army as any half-Saracenic Sicilian. That was why they did not sing. That was why they talked thus together, with the surly petulance and heart-break of exiles :

' Ja, Peppi, schaug'st ? Los a'mol a'Dierndl einikomma', verstegs't. . . .'

' So bleibt's. Ober s'is nich' gnuag, woass ? Frag nur s'Gastl a'mol. Gastl ! '

And Gastl, whose mind had been plucking at the yellow hair of his Wilhelmina, or Maridl it may have been, turns back from his dream crossly.

' Horr scho' aufi, Peppi, horr scho' aufi. Gott, wie lang bleibt man noch in dem verfluchten Saustaoll ? Scho' finf monat. . . .'

Poor lads, no wonder they do not sing. Enough for them

A cot beside the hill ;
A bee-hive's hum shall soothe my ear ;
A willowy brook that turns a mill . . .

What irks it them that the Canal flickers more like flame than water between the palaces ? And that the campanile on the island of San Giorgio opposite seems to be swaying in the wind of its own music ?

Wilhelmina (or Maridl) at her wheel shall sing
In russet-gown and apron blue . . .

And but a few minutes later I met Zerlino and Giuseppe upon the Riva degli Schiavoni where we had met them a year ago, a certain Young Poet and I. Looking through a curtain of plane-trees, as at this moment I do, between their trunks mottled like Dutch cows and through the opaque burden of their branches, many memories of Venice recur to me, grave, lovely, abiding. Hardly any is stronger than the colossal imagination of Tintoretto at Santa Maria dell' Orto—the ' Last Judgment ' whose turbid waters momently threaten to desert their poor continence of frame and canvas and batter in howlingly the match-box tinder of your skull. And there is the English parson who urged me to ' take a dish of tea ' with him, when we stood under the lurid, sulky smoulderings of the St. Mark's mosaics. (But then,

dear thing, he had the same formula at hand for a Dominican monk, terrible as Isaiah, who came our way that moment. And I doubt not that when he is presented to the Prime Mover of stars in their courses, the equipper of Orion with his sword, the furnisher of the Swan with his blazing wings, I doubt not that he will issue still another invitation to the taking of a dish of tea, even as they do at Chipping Norton.) Of him I have clear memory. And of a vision which flashed upon my inward eye in the solitude of SS. Giovanni e Paolo. It was a vision of John Ruskin climbing meritoriously up a ladder to inspect the tomb of Doge Andrea Veramin, to find out whether the sculpture on the side hidden from the spectator is scamped or no, his glee at the discovery that only the public side of the effigy has received the sculptor's attention, and, above all, the ghoulish rapture with which he records concerning the poor fellow, so indecently, so monstrously, yanked from his darkness : '*He was banished from Venice for forgery in* 1487.' Is it not hard to forgive him those italics ?

These things I remember well, but most of all Zerlino and Giuseppe who took us forth upon a cement-barge to wed the Adriatic.

The Young Poet was theorizing amiably upon the nature of the gondola. 'And the thing always to remember is this,' he emphasized severely, 'that the gondola is no pretty little convention, but the agent for the goings and comings of common men. Contrary to the popular idea, it is not exported regularly from Shepherd's Bush to the canals of Venice. It is your taxi and your milkman's cart and your greengrocer's barrow. There its true

romance lies. No enamoured Venetian would dream of addressing his lady from a gondola any more than you would from a tramcar or a dustman's cart.'

There was silence for some moments. A school of pigeons that had strayed from San Marco shimmered and curtseyed about our feet. 'And there are days,' continued the Young Poet, 'when you will see a larger gondola than these: dark it will be as a funeral scarf from stem to stern. Darker than the others it will seem because of the very flowers that wreathe the prow of it. You will see a coffin through shrouded windows. None so mean that he shall not know the honours of this journey. Behind the steady oars the mourners in their own gondolas will follow. And the waters that close behind them will dance neither more sombrely nor more gaily under the piled heaps of cheeses or vegetables following from the Rialto.'

'None the less,' I said firmly, 'we must see the sunset to-night among the lagoons. I know perfectly that other people have done the same thing, yet——'

'We must do it in a gondola, no doubt?' he inquired acidly.

'In a Thames steamer, if you like, or the tub of Diogenes.'

Then the Young Poet quickened step towards a swarthy group of sailors standing almost under the shadow of their own sails. 'They 'll do, I think!' he exclaimed excitedly. Our Italian was still, I must avow, rudimentary. (What heights and depths, what style, what idiom, my own was to attain on the uplands behind Sorrento this narrative shall make clear.) 'How much

for the afternoon?' we asked laboriously. 'We want to go beyond Lido there to the seawalls and the Adriatic!' I should blush to record the thousands of liras these unsophisticated children of wind and water first asked from us. Battlecock and shuttledore of argument proceeded vigorously. At last the glad summons came. 'Let us go,' bade a tall youth, tanned and scarred by the sea. His mate ran to the quay's edge and played featly among ropes. So it was we stepped upon Bucentaur to wed the Adriatic. As for the Young Poet, he who would have disdained for this ceremony the facile lure of the gondola, his eyes shone at the glory of it as we stepped upon our cement barge. Bluff and broad it sheered from the quay, bow and stern connected by one frail plank. The barge had brought in white sand that day from some Adriatic delta, and its hold was not yet swept clean. Sand clung to us where we held the masts or bent over to look into the dancing greenness below. Yet for all this, as the Young Poet stepped upon the barge, I heard him whisper, even as the old doges that earlier had passed this way, '*Desponsamus te, mare!*'

We had turned out from sight of the main island of Venice and its reiteration of distorted towers in the water at her feet. Around us the lesser islands expanded as we approached them, contracted as we sped onward. The posts that marked the edges of sandbanks stood forth like the towers of sunken cities. As the afternoon flushed and faltered towards evening the breeze slackened, the lagoons stretched lustrous in the silence. The reflections of the orange sails of fishing-boats were etherealized into plates of fine gold. They might have been pavement-

slabs for the colonnades of Heaven. We sat, Zerlino—he was the crew—and the Young Poet, and I, on the hatch that closed down the small black cabin at the stern. Giuseppe, captain of the vessel by reason of his twenty years, stood watchful by the mast. A great straw-skirted flask of Chianti was the fifth member of the company. We drank out of a tin cup which passed solemnly from hand to hand. A hole was punched in it, whereby it hung near the smouldering twig fire that was the boat's kitchen. Colour blazed about us in the minute troughs of the sea, or curled like fiery snakes or flared like comets. And here ran the two moles clean into open sea. And here the Adriatic was about us, rougher than the spread silk of the lagoons, but gentle still as a child's breast.

Ecstasy was upon us. Could we withhold it from our two friends that had steered us out of the murk of the world? Giuseppe's dark face was placid behind his cigarette. The teeth gleamed there like a slit of light. Zerlino fondled the flask of Chianti. Then it was that our pocket dictionary first made its appearance. We that could ask where the station was, and if it was possible to open that window, and could the water for shaving be a little hotter *per favore*, we were not competent, alas, with the vocabulary of ecstasy.

'What,' asked the Young Poet, 'is the Italian for "ineffable"?'

'Try,' said I, 'the Italian for "nice."'

He winced. The dictionary passed frantically between us, its passage punctuated with sharp bursts of conversation addressed to the sailors.

"But that book,' they asked, 'that book. What is it? Your Protestant Bible?'

We explained—with difficulty, it is true, but we explained. 'It contains all the words,' we said, 'in our two honourable languages. You see—it goes like this . . .'

'*All* the words,' they asked, awed and incredulous.

'*All!*' we lied. It would be difficult to enter into details regarding the differences between encyclopaedias and pocket dictionaries. And we did not want to qualify the intensity of the emotion with which they learned that so minuscular a volume contained all the words of two languages.

They took the dictionary reverently from our hands. Very slowly, because they could only read with difficulty, they turned letter after letter in the Italian section, page after page. Their faces and hands became more impassioned. They were nearing the initial letter of their search. They had attained it. Another leaf, and another. They were narrowing down on their quarry. Slowly, very slowly, their fingers hesitated down the page. I dare not guess what Chioggian variant of what brimstone Venetian blasphemy they sought for with so much passion. We could see their fingers lingering downwards, climbing upwards again, but finding home nowhere.

'Ah, but no!' they said, crestfallen. 'Ah, no, *signori*! It does not contain *all* the words!'

I must see about it. Our pocket dictionaries must not treat so scurvily the claims of blood and hell. Poor Zerlino, poor disappointed Giuseppe!

Thunder of surf upon the bar. The Adriatic causeway

shimmering like a street compact of solid light far away and far away to the Ionian Islands. The moment for return is upon us. There was no breath of wind. 'To the oars!' said Giuseppe. At bow and stern they stood, rowing forward lustily in the manner of the lagoons. Sunset among the islands was one vast 'Adoration of the Magi,' their goblets shining and their platters laden with gems. As the oars lifted, amethyst and ruby slid from them into this treasury of the sea. At last the distinct huge orb of the sun declined, touched the world's rim, and was no more seen. Darkness gathered. The lamps twinkled in low horizontal constellations from every flat hulk of island. Lido was hemmed with diamond. Now, after many hours we swung into sight of Venice. Never is the Doge's Palace, seen at night from the ducal waters, not a revelation never even dimly apprehended before. The Campanile is a shaft of black light.

'The lantern!' cried our captain. Floating lumps of darkness were bearing down upon us. Zerlino dived into the cabin and one moment later reappeared with a single frail candle. He surrounded it with tissue-paper and placed it at the bow, as it were a luminous flower blossoming there. So royally to the harbour-side, we bridegrooms of the sea. . . .

Hand-shakes are over; good-night is said. We are moving away when Zerlino stays us suddenly, standing on the quayside there against the masts and the stars. 'May we beg it, *signori*?' he asks diffidently.

'But what?'

'That little book . . . that one . . . with nearly all the words in it!'

'But certainly. With how much pleasure!'

'There remain,' smiled Zerlino, 'certain other words —perhaps we shall find them; and we shall return to Chioggia and swear in English all day in the piazza. Then we shall teach the girls how to say in English . . .' But there is no need to specify what instructions in our chaste language the girls of Chioggia were to receive.

A year ago, and here is Zerlino again, and Giuseppe, lounging on the quay.

'Did you find those words?'

'*Words*——'

'Words, words! So, too, declares our great poet! Giuseppe, Zerlino, how good it is to see you again! I cannot say——'

'This way, *signore*! You never tasted stuff like it in your life before. Round by San Zaccaria—you know it?'

'I don't. *Andiamo!*'

'All the *gondolieri* go there, when they've finished with the miserable *forestieri* for the day. Here, to the right——'

Yes, there is an altar-piece of Michele di Matteo Lambertini, methinks, at the Accademia, which is well worth your scrutiny. And you had not realized how fine a painter was Marco Basaiti. And the sunshine catches the brocade so featly in Boccaccio Boccaccino's. . . .

'This way, *signore*!'

It was an ineffable evening, even, should you consider the word more expressive, a nice evening, actually a nice evening.

CHIOGGIA—FERRARA—BOLOGNA

I

I WAS not incapacitated from boarding the steamer next day (or the day after, was it ?) which takes you from Venice through the lagoons to Giuseppe's own Chioggia. Now for the last time for many moons the regiments of Alps take divinely the northward horizon. Very clearly is the channel marked between the salt waste banks. White-painted posts bound together like asparagus grow from their own reflections as from unstable roots. The reflections sway and poke inquisitively like tentacles as the boat's swell disturbs them. Was there ever green gloom as I threshed through the blizzards of Saxony between the gargoyle formations that flank the Upper Elbe ? And have I known brown gloom in Bolton and grey in Turnham Green ? Fantasy ! How can such sunlight as this among these unregarded islands ever receive a check to its potency ? Not a blade of grass does not become sculptured emerald. Not a puffy cloud is not carven from alabaster. It has a quality to invest spoken speech with music and written with Sibylline significance. Here is an island which seems to be wholly one church. Above its portal ramps the lion of Venice, and a poster proclaims from its walls :

Lavoratori
Non Nominatevi
Non Votate
Padroni.

In comparison with so measured, so sonorous a solem-

nity as this, even the writing which so terrified Belshazzar becomes a mere 'Always see the road is clear before you pass behind the car.'

I am engirdled by Fascismo. I am not so terrified as I had hoped. There had been, of course, a certain grimness in the notice I read in Verona issued by the local Fascist authorities, to the following effect :

'For the tranquillity of the Fascisti of Verona I make cognizance that the rumours of an affair of blood which should have taken place at St. Michael are exaggerated.'

There was something agreeable in the limited nature of this repudiation. Although the gentleman would not go so far as to allow that St. Michael was an avenue of corpses like the progress of an Attila or a Tamburlane, it would do no harm to intimate that a certain amount of disembowelment and decapitation may have taken place. So much for Verona. And there were the picture-postcards of Mussolini at Riva and Vicenza and where you will. I make no doubt that the policy of Frightfulness in the late lamented War would have been an unqualified success if the enemy could have supplied an emperor or a field-marshal with a face so talented in picture-postcard melodrama as Mussolini's. I saw him later in Naples and there was an air of Hellene gravity about him. But in all this early postcardery his photographers represent him as a fit companion only for Mars, Bellona, Pluto, and the shadier deities generally. He is the reverse to the obverse of a medal representing Mr. Owen Nares. But whereas Mr. Nares looks so beautiful by nature, Mussolini looked so forbidding by

art. . . . For a time those Mussolini postcards frightened me, but the spectacle of the young Fascist at Venice in fullest war-paint was reassuring. Red fez, black shirt and tie, sage-green breeches, he prances about in them gallantly, rather as a young man in his Sunday best goeth forth to meet his lady, than one vehement with political fervours. So on the Rhine I was pleasantly disappointed by my experience of the black troops in the French Army of Occupation. German propaganda had left me fully resigned to the expectation that every black soldier I saw should be either beginning or concluding a meal whose main dishes were adult blood in skulls and babies in casseroles. But not one of them, so far as my experience went, had ever tasted a white baby in his life. And looking enviously upon my well-manicured Fascist at Venice, I was yielding to the conviction that never a Fascist in Italy could ever have stuffed a communistic maw with castor oil. The violent gentleman on the boat to Chioggia convinced me promptly of the contrary. Oh so violent ! No nonsense about him or the skull-and-crossbones badge in his buttonhole or the fat revolver in his hip-pocket. There was also a young honeymoon couple on board, the bridegroom considerably gentler in his demeanour than the bride. He too produced a fat revolver from his hip-pocket. The bride shuddered away to the extremity of the deck, and hid her face in her hands. Four or five other casual gentlemen produced fat revolvers from their hip-pockets. We looked like an arsenal. We bristled. I wanted to join the bride and accompany her in the ceremonial of covering the face with the hands. But the bridegroom was evidently not quite so gentle as

he had seemed. I stayed. I smiled yellowly from revolver to revolver.

But all this ostentation of flags and revolvers is, I am convinced, nothing more than a species of homoeopathy, a treatment of the eternal child in the Italian temperament by the injection of an acute dose of childishness. (Heaven defend that the sweet creature be treated wholly out of existence !) That is why, the earlier symptoms once played out, there is more courtesy and more maturity in the administration of Italian railways, companies, and cities than there have ever been before. That is why, behind the mask of Mussolini's *terribiltà*, there is more suavity and far more efficiency than the most antique statesman of the old régime manifested. In what other country, the traveller wonders, would so intense a nationalist movement have succeeded so signally, without causing infinite embarrassment to the stranger within her gates ? He thinks for a moment of the spasmodic Fascismo of Hungary, the sinister of Bavaria, and shudders. Then he recalls Mussolini, and the most Molochian distortion of his eyebrows in those early postcards is converted for him into the wink of one of the more amiable saints.

All that business about the Communists . . . but that is another tale. It 's all over now.

Then, as we slid across the lagoons, it was not quite over. Not quite. The Fascisti replaced their revolvers lovingly. The bride removed her hands from her face. That certain seagull, my continuous companion across all these waters, flown from the wild-hyacinth waters of Garda, swung round on her wing-tips and made forth again.

Here was Chioggia.

The only person in the company on board who seemed as if he could not hurt a fly was a polite young Sicilian officer, accompanied by his servant. I asked innocently to see the servant's bayonet, but the young fellow had left it behind in the little fort at Chioggia. The servant looked blackly at me. The officer looked blackly at the servant. And finally, by dint of my looking blackly at the officer, he was redeemed from the three days' *carcere* in which my idiocy had involved him. A good thing too. The Sicilian was the sole officer in charge at the fort and he invited me in to inspect it. It was a converted monastery and there was a pleasant dappling of light and shade in the cloisters. But the prison was highly unattractive. It was occupied by a slightly sloping platform where the prisoner, with the aid of a single blanket, made himself as comfortable as he might. His provender consisted of two pieces of bread and a jug of water. A black-eyed little creature cowered away from us as we entered. His whole body started twitching violently. You could not have seen a politer young Sicilian officer. We went off into his room and there he started inditing a letter to his *ragazzina*. He smacked his lips, twirled his pen, called in the guard, sent it out again, drew a love-knot in the corner of the paper, and still was not satisfied. At last he strode over to his exiguous book-shelves and took down a slim paper-backed volume. He turned its pages with increasing enthusiasm, pondered one of them with especial care, and then proceeded to work feverishly. The book was a *Segretario Galante* of which the function was *Per imparare a scrivere Lettere e Biglietti amorosi.* The volume threw a flood of light upon my own repeated

failures in this department of correspondence. I had not treated it seriously, scientifically enough. What though the spirit be willing if the technique be weak ? I looked so wistfully upon the volume that my friend offered it me with all his heart. ' Take it,' he said, ' your need is greater than mine. You poor Englishman.'

It has come in usefully upon one or two occasions.

The *Segretario Galante* lies before me now. It has a most exquisite picture in colour upon its cover. A young gentleman in a pale fawn coat and sage-green trousers is standing before a stone balcony ornamented with some magnificent voluted ironwork, vine-entwined, or it may be ivy. How he managed to reach so high is not clear, because there are indications that the balcony is on the second or third floor of the young lady's house. His hair clusters in thick golden curls about his ears, and a straw hat lies tilted back upon his hair. His moustache also is composed of golden curls. His collar is six inches high and looks uncomfortable. The young lady herself leans from the balcony and you could pass a wedding-ring about the slimness of her waist. Her tiny hand is about to fasten upon such a *biglietto amoroso* as is prescribed in these pages. The sleeves of her blouse are of the variety known as leg-of-mutton. The rest of that garment foams in a phalanx of flounces. Her eyes are tenderer than you can imagine.

The real value of the book, of course, lies in its ' *Molti Segreti infallibili per gli Innamorati.*' How thankful I was for them at Foggia ! What would I have done without them at Pozzuoli ! Ah, but what right had I to accept them from Pancrazio at Chioggia ?

For I met him again, months later, at Girgenti. He was going to America. The lady had turned him down. Or it may have had something to do with the fact that he had become an ardent Christian Scientist, herself one of the most pious of Catholic maidens. Yet I do not doubt that had he but retained his book of 'infallible secrets' something may still have been possible, despite Christian Science. And there sat he, poor lad, in the barracks at Chioggia, all ignorant of the sorrow fate held in store for him, transcribing to her the most passionate, the most superlative of all the letters in the *Segretario Galante*. And then we walked through Chioggia, which is all barrels of wine and folded or unfolding sails, and is slashed with sea-channels like an Elizabethan doublet with silk; and we drank a glass of 'bittair' together, in salutation to the absent ones. His eyes glowed like oranges in the groves of the Conca d'Oro.

I have realized more clearly since that day that the volume is one of the great comic possessions of the Italian nation. Just as the most abstruse mathematician from the universities uses most piously those penny volumes which interpret your dreams in terms of numbers, so that you might juggle less desperately with the figures for your lottery-tickets, so the most inventive and eloquent of the littérateurs are the most prone to avail themselves of the *Segretario Galante* to achieve their most intimate avowals. It is a sort of holy immolation of each his own highest faculty upon the wheel of a divine inanity. A swineherd or a barber's boy would contemplate these volumes with a lofty disdain.

Yet despite the sophistication of my Sicilian officer, I cannot persuade myself that, as he rendered his amatory periods from the little volume, he had, in any but a physical sense, his tongue in his cheek. Master as he was of conic sections and the integral calculus, an inviolable *naïveté* underlay them. I should have been less convinced of it, had he set up on an altar once dedicated to Santa Maria any other saint than Mary Baker Eddy, or if he had waited till he arrived in Minneapolis for the exchange of devotions, rather than consummated it in the grim, sulphurous desolation of the country by Girgenti.

'Bittairs' drunken, promises conveyed that some day we should drink them again in some western metropolis —through what a strange dun land I entrained southward, sea-abandoned, sea-remembering. What are these hueless stacks piled on the meadows? Not hay. Rushes, are they? Suddenly they sprout into trees. And the meadows themselves suddenly flower into sails, where some invisible canal threads the dark levels. A black hog snorts out from the front door of a house, then a black and white hog, a vast black goat. But never a coloured beast in this dun land, sea-forgotten, sea-remembering. The grass is grey, there are sand-hills in the heart of ploughland and sea round a hummock where you expected plough. The ploughed clods are colourless, and the town of Adria, which has given all this sea its name, lies securely inward, concentrating the paradox.

There is a pseudo-Giorgione at Rovigo, where you wait certain hours till the train carry you to Ferrara. You have no heart for pseudo-Giorgiones at Rovigo, recalling the one undenied verity at Castelfranco you

would not give yourself time to see, so impetuously you made for Venice.

Ferrara, then. . . .

II

There are commercial travellers and commercial travellers, certain among them take in Cardiff on their rounds, and one takes in Ravenna. The name of this last is Benini Epaminonda and Ferrara is his home. I cannot conceive courtlier manners than Epaminonda's in Castile or among the most reverend *genro* of Japan. Whether or not Greek blood is in his veins, or if it is the subtle effect, working inwards, of the goods he traffics in, much is due to the destiny which makes Ferrara the centre of his circle and establishes Ravenna upon its circumference.

Now I stayed for one night in Cardiff and all but one were commercial travellers, gentlemen ranging between late middle age and early senility. They passed dirty postcards between them and chuckled like little boys at a bad school. They recited dirty rhymes and rubbed their stomachs for joy. One gentleman, more toothless than the rest and friskier, took a tattered volume from his breast-pocket with infinite care ; all amid the stout and chops, and with no intermission save to dig our waitress in the ribs as she sallied in and out, he read the poor stuff with a sucking of the tongue between the teeth.

There was also a commercial traveller I met in the circum-Vesuvian railway between Pompeii and Naples, no less lecherous than my friends at Cardiff. I expressed my astonishment at the possibility of reconciling so carnal

and promiscuous an existence with his very fervent religion, for a rosary hung from his wrist, and he asked me to Santa Chiara for Benediction. In three moments I found myself entangled in such a maze of quotations from this saint, justifications from the early life of that other, references, cross-references, deductions and inductions, that I have not found my way out since.

And there is a commercial traveller from Macclesfield who gets mixed up in sonnets, and half-way through the sestette finds that the train has carried him two stations too far.

But most of all I care for Benini Epaminonda. Because he elaborated for me the heavy memories, Tassoesque and Byronic, of the surly castle in Ferrara, and its moated waters now strewn with dishonour. Because we walked along the mound which was once the wall of the city and he quoted canto upon canto of Dante, and I was certain my friends of Cardiff never added Milton to their repertory. But above all, because he spoke of some victory gained centuries ago by the army of Ferrara over the army of Venice, and his voice shook as if it had happened yesterday. That endeared him to me most of all. Far more than the *castagnaccio* he bought me to taste from a little cart with a little brazier of charcoal where they had just made it (and they call it *pinza* in Ferrara, common Italian not being enough for them). It is the sweetest and most horrible food I have ever tasted, most like ashes and tar and boots of any food God permits. Yet he looked so anxiously at me that I smacked my lips, and turned my eyes heavenwards, until I had despatched the last foul morsel.

He retained a certain humorous detachment about contemporary politics. From the first of the four towers of the castle, said he, not long ago floated the red flag of Communism. Curious, because none other than Mussolini was to be the deputy for Ferrara. At least, he had *due votazioni plebiscitarie* for Ferrara and Milan, whatever the distinction might be. The Communists were holding a meeting in the castle when a Fascist procession passed by in the street below. Bombs were thrown and three Fascists killed. You see three great garlands encircling their names on the old red walls of the castle. '*Ai martiri Fascisti del 20 Decembre 1920*,' you read. Strange, said Epaminonda quietly, because considerably more Communists have been killed since, and no garland on the castle walls keeps their names fresh. But even *his* imperturbability was shaken when we ascended into the Council Chamber, attracted by the vast crowds swarming thither. There was an action in process—a peasant had slain his son-in-law. His advocate had been pleading for him since before noon. It was seven o'clock now, and there seemed no likelihood that he would cease before midnight. All the cinemas and cafés were empty. There was only one attraction in Ferrara that night. I had never before heard such torrents of eloquence, dwindling so suddenly into shy, seductive little woodland streams, swelling as suddenly into broad irresistible rivers widening into an estuary and making, as you thought, for open sea, till once more the river turned on its tracks and was boiling among crags like a mountain cataract, uprooting trees. Epaminonda was visibly shaken. His eyes danced. Huzzas marked the more triumphant passages,

groans the denunciations. Still they crowded in from the city—a new detachment brought in by train from the country and cripples rising from their couches and lovers suspending their embraces. I, at least, left the Council Hall with the clear realization that the sacred thing to do with sons-in-law is to murder them.

What would the Estes of Ferrara have thought if they had not been allowed to put an inconvenient relative out of the way without incurring this odious publicity? I drank to the shades of them in a wine from Tuscany, served in a bottle broad-bottomed, and narrowing slimly in a long straight neck, like some rare alchemist's flask. I broke bread—tasteless, shaped like a spider's body—in the manner of a guest, for you feel the presence of the Estes strongly in this city.

Did I not read that day, in a notice pasted in the doorway of the Cathedral?

Nella Chiesa di Sant' Antonio Abate. Festa alla gloriosa nostra concittadina B. Beatrice II[a] Estense. Nel Giorno della Festa si canterà la solenne in musica con orazione panegirica.

But there is a lady more thrilling than she, whom Ferrara enshrines. None other than Lucrezia Borgia, whose tomb is of such humility, in the choir of the little convent-church of *Corpus Domini*, that you would think her days on earth had been no less full of pious works than the days of this blessed Beatrice whom music and panegyric orations were to celebrate. Perhaps they were. Perhaps Lucrezia knew no more of poison than that it might hasten a sick dog's death, and even that reduced

her to tears. Perhaps all her family were the victims of calumny fabricated by evil-livers to whom their gentle piety was obnoxious. The thought has occurred to more than one historian. How else could her bones have lain so tranquil under this graven slab? How else did it not crack like a dropped mirror over such infamy? How else could one black-veiled nun hold out her box for charity with the self-possession and gravity of a statue, while her companion knelt in the stalls no less like a carven image?

What a faculty have these nuns for reducing Life to a parenthesis, for exalting Death into the prime order of God? Bid them (or the sacristan, rather) show you the embalmed body of Santa Chiara in her church at Assisi. You descend into a crypt and stand before iron railings as if, being still alive, you are still of little account; your flesh, your breath, are to be rigidly prevented from contaminating this cadaverous ceremonial. Then the black nuns appear. A moment ago they were not there. You heard no sound, you saw no entrances. It is as if the lifeless air had congealed into them. Their hands reach forward stiffly, like the hands of marionettes. The curtains are withdrawn from before the supine body of Santa Chiara. Candles burn. As in the eyes of a dead man, there is no movement in the candle-flames. In the saint's whole attitude, in the mode of the hands, the firm curved line of the nose, there is an austere arrogance. She is proud that she has so many centuries ago transcended the meaningless irrelevance of Life. She is Death's image, perpetually preserved. Even flames, burning about her brows, become deathly. The nuns

draw the curtains together again, and place their alms-box before you as if bestowing a privilege. Whether you find yourself worthy or not to accept it, you have realized what a gross interruption you are in their glacial pageantry. Take your warm lips, your singing ears, your pumping heart away.

Take them, an you will, to Bologna.

III

I found Bologna under a pied carpeting of snow, dingy grey under the arcades, dingy yellow between them. I laughed the Bolognese snow to scorn, I who had lately been wallowing in profound metres of the primal Alpine stuff. The Bolognesi must have wondered why I leered.

It was dusk. Under one of the archways a beggar sat delivering a long incantation, in his hand a candle. He, in his draughty church, was engaged in a worship identical with the worship of his social betters in the city's hundred churches. All sang in a long hopeless monotone, as not knowing whether the gods they addressed were shadows or no. His candle and their altar-lamps served the same purposes—half to illumine the recesses to see if the gods were discoverable in them, half to illumine his own sorrows if the gods at length were discovered.

But look up suddenly, absolved from your god-huntings. On one side scales a high cliff of street, on the other a towering church of Renaissance brick. Between them a moon flees, harried by hounds of frosty cloud.

A strange, heavy, unsatisfying city, of great projects adapted and abandoned, leaning towers broken in mid-air, the manufacture of macaroni ousting the making of

scholars. See how the inconclusive bulk of San Petronio sits in the market-place. Refusing to have truck with Renaissance additions, it seems as if a paralysis had suddenly overwhelmed the Middle Ages, arresting their growth and drying up their blood, so that the ribs stick out of the brittle body. There is the same indecisiveness about the famous leaning towers which so impended over Dante's imagination. Shall they grow straight? Shall they come to an end? And there is no less bewildered a jumble called San Stefano—Byzantine domes, and Gothic pinnacles, all streaked with twentieth-century jerry-building, and hods of mortar swaying about dizzily, the suppression or re-opening of cloisters, a twelfth-century imitation of Christ's Sepulchre at Jerusalem, a grinning Virgin with flaxen hair, an early Virgin black as Styx. . . . Bologna confuses me.

In the church of St. Dominic you know where you are. You see a memorial stone to the young painter, Elisabetta Sirani, who was poisoned in her twenty-seventh year. It occurs to you that the artistic politics of our own day might be enlivened by an occasional poisoning. If you disapproved of a poem by Miss Sitwell, or a painting by Miss Hamnett, or a critique by Miss Rebecca West in one of her more exigent moods . . . well, nowadays, you merely disapprove.

Bologna is the city of architectural paralysis. Before Gothic had achieved itself, Renaissance placed an arrestive finger upon her growth. Nor was Renaissance allowed to substantiate its promises, as at Augsburg or Salzburg, before newer conceptions were hustling in the busy air of the town. I see in Bologna a type and foreshadowing of

these our modern cities. As the Gothic and Renaissance builders here were tranquilly working out their own problems and found one morning that Time had stolen a march on them and no one was interested in the solutions they were striving for, so our own builders are labouring in terms of ferro-concrete and steel until a moment when it is blindingly forced home upon them that the very laws upon which their philosophy of architecture is based are overthrown and new laws established. The real structure of the atom, it may be, is at length understood ; or a theorist has suddenly discovered that gravitation need be the least of his preoccupations, so that houses may henceforth flower into heaven rather than plant themselves grimly upon earth. And behold some monstrous crane, its vast claw arrested in mid-sky, stands as a funeral monument to the architecture of which but yesterday it was the most powerful instrument ; stands in the heart of London as the *Torre Carisenda* in the heart of Bologna, and men will quote in the two towns equally :

Qual pare a reguardar la Carisenda
Sotto il chinato, quando un nuvol vada
Sopr' essa si che ella incontro penda. . . .

Yet it must not be imagined that Bologna cannot achieve a job she sets out to do, if she really gets her teeth into it. I call to witness the tremendous arcade which ascends to the Madonna di San Luca in a series of six hundred and sixty-six arches, two miles of the worst frescoings in the world. There are subsidiary chapels frequently, but every single arch is smeared with a design wrought out of squashed boiled potato in the manner

imputed to G. F. Watts by George Moore, and a dilution of Reckitt's Blue imputed to Bronzino by Grant Allen. Or it may not have been Grant Allen. Anyhow, he was unpardonably rude to Bronzino, who is one of those painters who appeals to you vastly, despite your austerer aesthetic judgments. His large-limbed Venuses, I mean, and curly-haired Cupids. Anybody can admire his portraits without losing critical caste.

Or it may not have been Reckitt's Blue, which had not been invented in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

At all events, there 's no doubt about the squashed boiled potatoes.

Some defiant pagan had preceded me on the ascent to the Madonna, and half-way up the slope had proceeded to chalk on every fresco the subversive symbol I have previously commented on—the flattened and inverted doubleyou. And tacked on to the doubleyou the name of the Virgin herself !

M Maria

read my appalled eyes.

By the time I saw this malediction for the hundred and fifty-sixth—perhaps it was the hundred and fifty-seventh—time, I began to wonder whether the fellow had been a pagan after all. Or whether he 'd started out as a pagan. I could conceive a most ardent Catholic setting out on the ascent sprightlily. But grant him a rotund stomach and a scant stock of wind. For the first thirty or forty arches he is as strong a believer as Jerome or Augustine. At the fiftieth, the least shadow of a doubt begins to torment him. At the eightieth his underclothes are soaked

in sweat and at the hundred and tenth he has given up wiping it out of his eyes. His path is now littered with the débris of doctrine after doctrine, thrown overboard by him like ship's ballast. At the hundred and thirty-fifth he is nothing more nor less than a Unitarian. Paradoxically enough he retained the Infallibility of the Pope until two arches ago, long after he had discarded all the doctrines regarding which the Pope is infallible. Then suddenly in a shrill gust, like the noise of air escaping from an inner tube, religion quits him utterly. From the hundred and fifty-sixth arch onward he chalks evilly the name of Maria and the symbol of deposition.

It may be objected that this interpretation is too fanciful. But what else would meet the case? I toyed for a moment with the idea that it was some pilgrim with an acute sense of aesthetic values. It was the cumulative effect, I began to speculate, of these abysmal frescoes that had wrought him to this irreverence. Hopefully he had set out at the foot of the colonnade. Although the hopelessness of the colour would be quickly enough apparent, he might say to himself: 'Somewhere an artist will display the glimmerings of a sense of composition. A feeling for tactile values might be too much to hope for. But if not a grouping, then at least a curve—my God, a single curve—with some aesthetic quality. . . .'

Then came the fatal hundred and fifty-sixth arch.

Yet I don't think there 's much in the idea. I don't think there is much connection between the devotional and the aesthetic senses. There was a gentleman in San Petronio that morning, of the acutest aesthetic sensibility. That was evident. But it functioned exclusively outside

the church. He had a velvet coat, side-whiskers, and a black bow, so if *he* hadn't any aesthetic sensibility, who had? He went round all the altars in the church and muttered a prayer before each; but at the first on the left, the ugliest of them all, a baroque nightmare, he remained for ten minutes and made it his especial confidant. All of which knocks on the head the aesthetic explanation of the wicked signs in the colonnade that leads to the Madonna di San Luca.

The incarnate as well as the discarnate presence of a grotesque accompanied me, for I overtook a foul old beggar who must have set out many, many hours ago from the foot of the arcade. I never saw a human being so utterly void of muscular or osseous control. Curious movements started at his shoulders and rippled down to his finger-tips, or undulated in and out of his thighs. It was not easy to realize whether he was intending to move backwards or forwards. He was, I suddenly realized, nothing but a travesty, or a prototype, of the shimmy-shake at that moment desolating the dancing-halls of Europe. Most vividly he recalled to me a shimmy-shake performed in the gilt-and-crystal fatuity of the Palais de Danse at Berlin. Huge leering caryatids, the seething of bad champagne, ragtime groaning and gnashing its teeth like the throes of a race *in extremis*, the indistinguishable prostitutes dancing with each other to exhibit their charms, dancing with their captures when their charms have produced their effect. And in the midst of them, a young lady and gentleman performing for their admiration the shimmy-shake the deft pair had so laboriously trained to achieve, the shimmy-shake which the old

beggar at Bologna performed with no tuition soever. . . . And yet, at Berlin, the sleek young man and his flaming woman cannot have practised it more than three months in all. It had taken this other eighty or ninety years to acquire.

On attaining the shrine I found something of the same ostentation of marbles and features in the shrine of the Madonna di San Luca as I found in the dancing-hall at Berlin. Not so oppressively, mark you, as at the Hofkirche there. For such is the mortal faculty of baroque, that I had felt in Berlin it would have done no violence to either building if the indistinguishable ladies had been set to dance in the Hofkirche and the chilly worship which I attended in the Hofkirche had been set to evolve under the leering caryatids of the Palais de Danse. Now in the passionless enormity of St. Peter's, you cannot say that either one or the other is appropriate. There is no spectacular function of conglomerate man which would not be appropriate there. If ever a world-congress of the monarchs of cinema is established at St. Peter's, or some central body of the world's scientists propounds its philosophy for the reception of the world's wireless installations, or whatsoever you will of cold and colossal organization, it would be fitly housed. There was a group of precise young men enfilading through the colonnades of Bernini and performing scheduled manœuvres among the fountains. Certain others maintained a dumb-show oratory on the steps of the cathedral. And steadily, steadily, two or three cinema cameras pursued them. Now it struck no note of heinous inappropriateness here, as it would assuredly have done before any Gothic church

in the world. St. Peter's is too big to have any room for God.

Giovanni Paolo Panini, who painted an 'Interior of St. Peter's,' now in the Louvre, had the same feeling. The enormous hall is stiff with powdered perukes and shapely with padded legs. So much bowing and scraping is there of high ladies and gentlemen that St. Peter's might be the world's chief dancing-academy. In the left foreground two peasants make a woeful attempt at prayer. They think better of it, remembering where they are.

The chapel of the Madonna di San Luca in Bologna was empty. The marble, the gilt candlesticks, the two flights of carved steps leading from the choir to the altar, emphasized its emptiness. An old priest appeared, and would I look upon the portrait of the Madonna St. Luke had painted? It was the first of them I had met. I was to meet many more. It is a thing less to marvel at than to exult in that so much of the actual substance connected most intimately with the tale of Christ survives for the worship of the faithful. His blood, pieces of the Cross, the thorns, the nails, the handkerchief of Veronica, the winding-sheet. And subsidiary to them, relics of the people about him—the Virgin's house, her milk—or is not that a fiction of Mr. Moore's?—the chains of Peter, the bodies of his apostles. . . .

Who can conceive what actual transubstantiation may not take place by the cumulative intensity of so much faith? For the further we are removed from the first attribution to a relic of its sacred quality (whether the attribution be true or false at the beginning) the more poignant is the worship that surrounds it. If a mere

mesmerist can produce results so palpable, what change may not by now have taken place in the blood at Bruges, by force of such anguished willing and believing it for so many centuries the authentic blood long ago shed ?

The priest called to a peasant woman outside the church, then assumed alb and stole. He drew aside the silver portals and the woman threw herself down before the portrait with a moan like a hurt child. Only the faces of the Madonna and the child were visible, and their hands, I think. But I was blinded by the blaze of jewels that hid the rest of them. A passionate antiphony was maintained between the priest and the woman, and it drummed mournfully into my ears as the jewels beat against my eyes. Then the priest took forth a silver frame from I know not where, and kissed the glass it enclosed. Behind the glass was preserved a fragment of a robe Mary had worn. Then he placed it to the woman's lips and she kissed it wildly, and would not take her lips away. Then remembering I was a foreigner, he wiped the relic perfunctorily with his sleeve, and I too kissed it, and at length the silver portals were drawn to against St. Luke's picture and we descended the altar steps. The peasant woman went out to her fields again.

I stood on the parapet and looked over to the Apennines and the setting sun, which made translucent marble out of the successive mountain-ranges. Below me was a field ribbed with snow, and beyond a line of indigo cypresses. Then foothills and greater hills beyond, and the sun sinking like a doomed ship into extinguishing waters of cloud.

CHAPTER FIVE

RAVENNA

I

RAVENNA will remain for me one of the peaks of experience. Ravenna, Rothenburg, Castrogiovanni, curiously lifted from the lands they are part of, so that they are alien as clouds or islands ; and yet just so curiously the mouthpiece of the last secrets of these lands, that had eluded me long. Having known them, I could resign myself to decades of Willesden, or should have the power, when the moment came, to pull down the pillars of the London and Southern Railway Junction Station, and tangle its complex of lines like a skein of wool.

I am grateful to the *cocchiere* who drove me to the Hotel San Marco in a series of zigzags and ricochettings which proved his conviction that a straight line is the most economical distance between two points. The hotel is but a matter of yards distant from the station, but the perambulant coffin driven by my friend knew better than to let me profit by that propinquity. So we lurched along dark streets and narrow, dark streets and narrow, in contracting and widening circles about my destination. There were moments—I deduced later—when the *cocchiere* thought he had made almost enough out of me, and was for depositing me at the San Marco. Then suddenly he thought worse of it, and turned the horse's head away at a violent right angle, only to bring into my ravished sight some new romanesque portal or looming campanile.

The enchantment began to creep along my veins like a golden sand. A mist arose from the sea that evening,

and the outlines of shops and dwelling-houses became as fantastic as any window or portal a thousand years old. Any person suddenly substantial in the lonely street became as romantic as any shade it may have evoked from any of its histories—emperor's or priest's, general's or poet's, even great Dante's shade, whose tomb is here.

Is there no romance which a fortuitous mist or an ophthalmic defect does not supply? What connection with romance have the real ploughman, sailor, harlot? Romance springs suddenly in the independent brain for wild doomed moments. A tall pillar solidified the darkness of Ravenna. A light placed on its summit blew upward on the statue that crowned it and etherealized the statue. *There* was romance, in my own brain—not in the statue, which may have been (and is) dull and florid stone, nor in the light, which may have been turned on by a switch merely, as are the altar lamps that burn before St. Dominic's tomb in Bologna. An aeroplane flew high, I recall, over that same city, hovering at the zenith of a stainless sky. It threw out upon the air thousands upon thousands of handbills, red, blue, and yellow. Slowly, slowly, they circled and descended, and each time they turned towards the sun they shone like the wings of gulls. They winked and shone and winked again, and all the skies were full of birds, more coloured than birds are ever. The announcements came to earth and declared that Signor Carini directed the most distinguished photographic atelier in Europe, and that the Fascisti of Bologna would flatter him by accepting a twenty-five per cent. discount on his prices, already reduced to almost suicidal abysses. As for Socialists, he had no truck with

them, if even they pressed upon him a hundred per cent. increase upon his charges. All this concerning Signor Carini was for a later moment and mood. The first was full of wings and gay with jewels. The first was romance, the second humour. (I am prepared for the point of view which would interchange these qualities.) And a woman issued from a dark portal in Ravenna, holding a steaming dish of food, no less lovely than some Byzantine court-woman swinging a censer to a fantastic degradation of Christ.

Oh, but she needed to prepare her own dishes. She could have found no place in Ravenna where she might have ordered it. If, on the contrary, she desired to get herself shaved, she would have had no difficulty. All the modern vitality and luxury of Ravenna is concentrated in its barbers' shops. There the citizens congregate and console themselves for lost glories, how lost and how glorious !

Yet their mosaics remain. And in my mind also, whence nothing will expunge them. I want to know this :—Is there in the exercise of all arts, spiritual and physical, in the passive arts of appreciation and the active arts of creation, is there such a moment of revelation that, in the respect of the particular art with which the soul is just then concerned, all life previous was empty and all subsequent life will be full ? We must be concrete about it, beginning with common arts, which offer no difficulty. Swimming, say, or cycling. The acquirement of these things may be easy or difficult, but is there anybody who does not remember that moment before which he could not swim, or cycle, and after it he had the freedom, how-

ever restricted, of water or road? Of course there is laborious business to follow, as laborious business has preceded it. But by virtue of that moment he has become a citizen of a new city. It remains for him only to glean its honours. And in dancing, too. Suddenly you find you are no surly slave nor hectoring master of the dancing-music. You are its partner, its familiar. Well I remember the divine moment which was the peak of my ski-ing adventure last winter. Let me tell of it, for it so vividly illustrates this point.

It was in the terrain of the *Innsbrucker Ski-Verein* where the young Austrian firebrands had forgathered concerning whom I have already spoken. Laboriously I climbed the deep snows of the Fotscherthal in a pair of corded snowshoes, and attained the hut, after more anguish than is easily conceivable (for little Heinrich had so inefficiently fastened my snowshoes that I sank hip-deep at every second movement). Then Herr Dornoch, than whom all Austria knows no more skilful photographer, bound a pair of skis about my boots and I was dismissed. I was given the freedom of all the slopes save one, that swooped in great white curves downward from the apex where we were standing. And in that one prohibited direction lay disaster. For the mountain suddenly broke in the overhanging lip of a ravine; below a torrent boiled among snow-helmeted rocks.

Morning succeeded morning on the tops of the world, and bitterly I grew to understand that snow may be more sticky than treacle and wooden skis may develop a demon pliability and roll themselves about your neck like leather thongs. I learned how to endure humiliations and agree

that they were unbearably funny, as the lissome youths swooped like eagles upon the pit of my despondency. I learned to accustom myself to a sheet-armour of frozen snow secure between my underclothes and my skin. I learned that when you had fallen down (when had you not ?) the only way to rise to your feet again was to bury yourself passionately in the snow and burrow there like a mole.

Then at last this moment I am telling of occurred, this incredible moment which unifies the Fotscherthal in Austria and the Brera at Milan and a cinder-croft in Manchester and the Baptistery of the Duomo in Ravenna, this incredible moment. I had lifted myself on to my skis again after a collapse more than usually extended. Resignedly I awaited the prompt succession of cataclysm. It did not arrive. It did not arrive, I say. I had achieved the secret of balance. In a divine parabola I winged down the mountain-side. But even as the wind sang about my ears, a most hideous shriek rent the primal silence. It was the voice of Herr Dornoch. I had taken the one deathly direction so urgently denied me. I, too, realized the imminence of my destruction, for a strange thing had occurred ; even as I had gained the secret of continued movement upon skis, so had I lost the art of falling, which had been my sole accomplishment. 'Fall !' cried I to myself imperiously. But I could not fall. There was nothing for it but extinction in the ravine below.

And then a philosophical conviction seized me. Must I not make the most of these superb ultimate moments ? Oh, assuredly. I resigned myself to them. Such are

a saint's moments of beatitude under the shadow of martyrdom. Had I not all my life yearned to be engaged upon precisely this exquisite occupation, in which soul and body were adjusted in completest harmony? How noble a setting for a shuffling off of this mortal coil! Peak beyond solemn peak ranged for spectators, the cataract to provide orchestral music, and none but Herr Dornoch to lament me (and he lamenting rather a brand-new pair of skis he had unwisely lent me, because my Tirolese accent is so seductive).

Nature was stronger than philosophy. The unconquerable matter-of-fact instinct of self-preservation welled from the cisterns of my subconscious and seized all my body as in a vice—nerves, bone, and muscle. I found them combined in a magnificent swerve such as only experts achieve after years of pious practice. Telemark, Schwungbogen, Christiania—you must go to Herr Dornoch for its name. I was saved. I was ski-ing placidly along the ravine's brim.

A stranger who had but arrived in time to witness these manœuvres, came to me and congratulated me on my skill. It was my technique which had impressed him even more than my courage, which in a less consummate ski-er than myself he would have deemed foolhardiness.

'Could I,' he asked diffidently, 'put you down to represent our *Ski-Verein* in the great competition this year at Kirchbichl?'

I declined. The international secretary at Christiania, I grieved to say, had already bespoken my presence. And I sat down gently in the snow and sang songs.

Here then is a moment in an executive and physical art. But the case is far different, you object with heat, in the spiritual arts, the arts of creation or appreciation. You yourself have been born, I hear you insisting, with the art of poetic appreciation fully fledged in your bosom. It was in anticipation of that very objection that I recited yesterday to a female baby of my acquaintance ten consecutive pages from the anthology called 'Wheels.' Her reactions were entirely dubious. I could connect none of them beyond peradventure of doubt with my subject-matter. Mark you, I do not suggest that these moments necessarily occur when we are most strenuously anxious for revelation, or even in our waking hours at all. They might well happen when we are asleep or in some stratum of subconsciousness. It is to be confessed that that makes them the more difficult of proof. (But I am doing my best.)

Such a moment wrought light and heat in me before Bellini's *Pietà* at the Brera Gallery and before the stained glass in Strassburg Cathedral. Painting and glass had meant much to me before, but mind and soul were isolated in contemplation of them. They would not be separate again. But greatest of all the passion which in one moment awoke in me for Christian mosaic as I stood under the dome of the Baptistery by the cathedral in Ravenna, and looked up to the gold garments of the Apostles, and beheld how they stood upon green earth and how Christ soared from the frozen flowing of Jordan. The mosaics of St. Mark's had passed me by. I was aware of their magnificence as of a mountain's magnificence seen through a mist. I had even intelligence enough to perceive how crassly wrong are the mosaics

done to the designs of Tintoretto and Titian and what a violence was wrought upon the two arts. The fluidity of painting cannot be adapted to the holy fixity of mosaic (or of stained glass, as at New College) without outrage. But there is such other stuff encrusting the glooms of St. Mark's with flame and jewels as will make me sick with beauty—this revelation having once been vouchsafed to me—when I am in Venice again.

Perhaps I am not taking this adequately into account : that there is no mosaic in Italy or Sicily, and hence in all the world, so lovely as precisely this mosaic at the Baptistery of the Duomo, and, not far away, in the tomb of Gallia Placidia. It is almost the oldest, of course, being of the fifth century, the fourth-century mosaics in Santa Pudenziana in Rome suffering from a double disability—they are restored in a considerably larger degree and have not achieved the same unexampled fusion of the Roman and Christian spirit. There is no comparison at all between these mosaics of Ravenna and the remaining earlier stuff of Rome and Naples—Santa Costanza and the Baptistery.

What lightness and freedom is there in the movement of these gold-clad Apostles treading the immortal circuit of their cupola :

Their limbs of translucent fires are treading the heavenly ground.
O the beat, beat, beat of their dancing in their windy palaestras of gold,
Their angelical aeromancing. . . .

At its very apex Christ receives the waters of baptism

in the dawning of his Kingdom. The river-god of Jordan emerges shaggily to present the new god with a cloth ; it is as if all nymphs, all satyrs, all dryads and nereids, every ghost of hill-top and submarine cave, meadow, grove, and stream, conspired in the great renunciation of paganism. For Olympus, Zion, for the many gods, three. Over Christ's head the Dove broods ; and if anywhere in the world the air is strict with God, it is here, be sure, in the Baptistery of the Duomo at Ravenna.

Here, I say, and in the mausoleum of Gallia Placidia, the loveliest place on this or any star.

Not God,
In gardens,
When the evening's cool ?

asked the poet irritatingly. Transfer his query, I beg you, to this minute area of enchantment. Oh, you will be troubled by no further doubtings. There is no more light here than passes through thin slabs of alabaster, diffused into such a radiance that you think it despatched from some star more delicate than the sun, and flowing through an azure gloom so quick with twinklings and bespanglings that you dream yourself fathoms deep in an unvisited sea. Such flowers as these, where bloomed they, and through what woods roamed these beasts ? Doves arrested upon their pretty pink-footed curtseyings, gold stags with blunt mouths leaning to the baptismal pool, St. Lawrence assuming an heretico-combustive wrath over flames voluted like rays of coral, the hand of the Good Shepherd nuzzled by his sheep, and Gallia Placidia gazing upon them all in the proud heyday of her queen-

hood, wondering how soon, how soon, into so small a span would be confined the vast orbit of her wanderings and the epic of her loves !

If there is one place in the world which might hold my feet from their journey sunward, and bind me in a spell, and seize me and petrify me until my eyes and cheeks and mouth are broken into little coloured cubes, and arabesques contort about my brain and lilies split my limbs, it is your tomb, O Empress, your tomb, and I your more bounden slave than any in Narbonne or Constantinople or Ravenna Felix, that looked on you, or dared not look, two thousand years ago.

II

I confess it grieved me to find I might not pitch my tent in those gardens where once Byron strode, flinging back his hair. The guide-books tell you that his *palazzo* was converted into the Hotel Byron and that it has pride of place ; but you will look vainly now for concierge in that melancholy building to relieve you of staff and scrip. How long ago is it that his name failed of its old potency ? Or is the *palazzo* the scene of some redoubtable victory of the ecclesiastical party over the forces of freemasonry with which the author of *Don Juan* must surely be identified ? Did the victors exorcize that bad spirit with bell, book, and candle ? I found my way thither, my first evening in Ravenna, having been told blankly at the very station that ' Byron ? No, *signore*—there is no such *forestiere* in this town.' ' *Hotel !* ' I insisted bitterly, ' *Hotel !* ' They shrugged their shoulders, not without sympathy. Then it was that the rotatory

cocchiere seized me and delivered me at the San Marco. No long time passed before I was making my way through Adriatic mist to my lord's dispossessed house—a shoe-shop and a Café Byron—so much at least—feebly endeavouring to extract from the name's pale glamour a stray soldo or two. Never a guest at its tables, to drink even unconsciously a salutation to the poet. But a statue in the piazza there . . . to whose dark eyes and dark heart erected but our poet's own, surely ?

Oh you get tired, verily, you get tired, of the Risorgimento, of Garibaldi even. Upon this occasion I could have spared this monument to his virtues. I wish it had been a statue of Byron there, engirdled by melancholy trees, and the mist slipping between them like his own disconsolate loves. There, there, too faithfully, hovers the Guiccioli. Alas, alas ! The ecclesiastical party may have been too strong to have permitted a statue to Byron, or the immanence of Dante too overpowering. But I take courage from the discovery that in this same palace where once the Hellespontine swimmer dwelt, the 'Sport Club di Ravenna' now assembles. It may be the thin end of the freemasonic wedge. Whether it be or no, I shall return some day and bear with me a cohort of revellers to make the Café Byron resound to the poet's praises. I hardly know why I am so enthusiastic on my lord's behalf. I have never had a tithe of this enthusiasm before. It must be those empty tables, and the sallow little man who waited behind the bar dispiritedly and no man came. Or more probably that statue of Garibaldi, that most meritorious statue, looming out of the desert square.

Next evening I made my way towards an older monument—that mausoleum of Theodoric the Goth, roofed by a vast block of Istrian limestone, the legend tells, to protect his Aryan head from shafts of retributory lightning. But vainly, vainly ; for not even that redoubtable monolith was proof against the Nicene creed. The track of lightning runs across it from centre to circumference, and below it lay the heretic's body like a charred log. As well hope for shelter under a fool's cap and bells. How swiftly, indeed, were the hounds of orthodoxy on Theodoric's traces, whether lightning consumed him, or clawed demons, like Alpine eagles bearing a chamois away, dropped him into a funnel of Lipari to disintegrate among the spurts of sulphur. How mournful a prognostication of all intolerance are those three dismembered hands which may still be seen on the porticoes of Theodoric's palace, as rendered by his craftsmen in the mosaic of the naves at Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, and as not wholly expunged by the orthodox frenzy which rioted after his death. And neither the hand of Catherine nor Cromwell nor Horthy will be stayed by that remonstrance, nor will grass be the less red a thousand years hence than it was on Calvary, in Ravenna, or Kishinev.

I could find no way through these malodorous fields into the tomb, for here a ditch of noisome waters prevented me, there a high locked gate. A girl of extreme beauty leaned from the upper window of a hovel and directed me along paths even more impenetrable than the rest. Following her behest, I floundered into knee-deep mud, as men have floundered before, and would have gone further for less reward. But a shrivelled hag suddenly

became manifest to me with a noise like a whirring of wings, as if she had clattered down from some dusky nest in the tree-tops.

'This way!' she pointed; and we blundered through a playground of snorting swine to a hedge thick as the tomb's own walls. She pointed out a clean hole in the leafage like a tunnel made by some water-side beast, and I slid through. There is philosophy here, I said, of a lovely maiden who but entangles you in thorns, and a vile hag who will instruct you to arrive at journey's end slickly. Philosophy here, I said, but I dared not pause to resolve it in the dank tomb. The moon was now so fragile a lamp suspended over the wilderness, that these grim blocks were grimmer and more immense than I had ever known masonry before. Bats squealed in and out of their dark holes, fearlessly close about my head, as if they knew how much more right they had there than I. Had Theodoric himself, soul or body, been strong enough to dispute their sovereignty?

All Ravenna lay like a city of the dead, guarded by smoky lamps of sunset. Exhalations thickened upon the air, or grew like more subtle trees out of roots that no man can dislodge into branches that shall not be lopped down. As their full blossoms shook, a poisonous pollen was sprayed into eyes and heart. Death is the ceremonial of importance in this place; as if to be alive here is an irreverence towards those august who kinged and queened it and wrought unmortal beauty. And perhaps that is why the whole countryside had gathered that afternoon to follow the bier of a dead citizen.

'The *sindaco* is it who died?' I inquired. 'A man

of some substance?' For it seemed that the whole coastland from Friuli to Rimini had gathered to do him honour. Wreaths so mountainy, vehicles so multitudinous, I had not before seen. 'No, a man!' was the reply. '*Un uomo qualunque!* A man like other men!'

You might think that for these people only to die was to behave decorously in Ravenna. The bats in the mausoleum of Theodoric had no doubt of it.

III

Is there not, moreover, the whole mute corroboration of Classe, that extinguished city which once was the port of Ravenna, and consists now of a railway station, a sugar factory, and the church of Sant' Apollinare, more grave in its desolation than any church in Christendom and as exalted in its beauty? The more I recall the disinterred vulgarities of Pompeii the more subtly Classe dominates my imagination. If Pompeii must take a doom to herself, it must be the flamboyance of earthquake and eruption. If Classe must pass from men's eyes, the generations shall lay her low with insidious sieges and the corrosion of her towers. Slow sands must silt down upon her, and canals heave against the obscured moon in the place of her streets. For the banners that once waved over her, anchored and floating weeds will strain to the sea. And the pine-woods must bear down upon her century beyond century, and the stalks of rice must shoot from the sockets of men's eyes. Shall Pompeii have her novelist? In faith, Bulwer Lytton will serve. But to tell the forgotten tale of Classe—to recall the

rhythm of Roman hammers pounding across her ship-building yards and how Theodoric, encamped against Odoacer, laughed in his beard to see his plans prevail ; and what consummate craftsmen were these that in the apse of her church set the tall saint discoursing to the faithful, figuring them as a flock of sheep ; and made that green background, which is the colour of early wheat, or apples in fresh lands, or of those pale layers of greenness which, at sunset in Greek harbours, tremble above the lower reaches of molten brass and lemon yellow ; and made those pines and olives and cypresses which spring out of that mosaic meadow ; and what flowers there are under those unmoving branches ; and what flowers were plucked under her veritable trees, to decorate what brows, to convey what messages . . . which romancer, I ask, shall tell the tale of these things ?

Walk with bowed head through the frozen air of dawn to the pine-wood of Classe, more noble with memories than any wood else in the world—Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Dryden, Byron. Your very breath puffs and fumes like a censer ; and is that not why the early painters so clearly render upon their canvases the breath of ox and ass, leaning over Christ's crib ? The marshy rice-fields which are the tomb of Classe seem innocent this morning as a limestone plateau. Well we know how this very evening the year's first vapours will embarrass the air, and the sinking sun soak them through with blood. In what humility, passing along the borders of the last of these sluggish streams, you reach the outpost pine of the wood. But no. Looking behind you or horizontally across the plain, here and there and further

away, stands another outpost pine and another, telling how much vaster the wood was once ; and who knows how many fires have ravaged it ? I speak of this humility because I have bitter knowledge of that sort of traveller whose particular glory it is not to be impressed when he falls within the shadow of the world's impressive monuments and men. Have I not heard him squawk his derision over Shelley's hair in the Bodleian ? And is he not the sort of traveller who will make his way across Venice on roller skates, because there is a tradition in that city that the gondola is a convenient mode of transit ? Will a young modern novelist have occasion to despatch a character of his invention down the Grand Canal ? This will be the way of it :

> ' The porter pushed her, with her bag, into a damp gondola, and the dismal voyage to the hotel began. There were a few lights here and there, but she had the impression that she was floating down the Chicago River in a wash-tub.'

Or will W. D. Howells achieve the Pope's company. (At a public mass, I mean. A private audience might have impressed him differently.) And what other memory will he carry away than that His Holiness had a cold in the nose ? Or when Hazlitt discovers in Rome that ' the smell of garlic prevails over the odour of antiquity,' is it not really Hazlitt's misfortune, not Rome's ? And are there not sweet young men too clever by half to be taken in by Milton and Titian ? Is it not just that young-mannishness which is rather intolerable in Samuel Butler, who would consign ' Raffaelle, along with Plato, Marcus

Aurelius Antoninus, Dante, Goethe, and two others, neither of them Englishmen, to limbo as the Seven Humbugs of Christendom'? God knows, I would sooner worship a charlatan than spit upon a demigod. Let us pray that in His goodness, God may deliver us from either dishonour.

Every grass-blade and leaf in the undergrowth of the *pineta* was converted by its sheath of rime into a new foliage. But now at length the sun was beginning to attain strength to pierce even the close roof of pines. Hardly had I entered the wood than I was aware of rustlings and crepitations, where the melted rime slid below on to briar and juniper. There were whisperings you could not relate to these. And sudden syllables

Soft as a bubble sung
Out of a linnet's lung.

And more solemn voices where the pines soared into such cathedral dimness that Cologne and Milan seemed in retrospect not more than antechambers to these central courts of the Lord.

At remote intervals over the plain, as I returned towards Classe, I saw men that went shooting, with dogs at heel and baskets slung over their backs. A cart lurched by which consisted of four beams suspended over its two wheels and a net slung between the beams. The net being stuffed with hay, I doubt not many a Roman noble at rest twenty feet under the wheels had never driven forth from his stables more comfortably than the driver. And was he ever, I speculated, as hungry as the sharp air had made me? Did he ever feed so royally as I that day?

Blessings upon my host, the sacristan of Sant' Apollinare in Classe, and the multitudes of women that occupy the farm under the campanile. He bore no evident signs of the flesh mortified, my genial *parroco*, nor of the spirit subjected to harsh discipline. And I wonder why he deemed it necessary to assure me as soon as I entered the living-room that the little girl baby who was being nursed in the corner by a second little girl baby (not more than a few ounces heavier than her charge) why he deemed it necessary to assure me that the first little girl baby (or any of the many little girl babies there, for that matter) was less his daughter than his niece. I had not suspected that she was his daughter, even though, if you count paternity by chins, he deserved any amount of congratulation. But the fact is that his black loose frock made you think of him as but one member, if a solid one, of the room's limitless femininity. He seemed an Achilles in Scyros among the spinning maidens. The maidens who were not spinning—or sewing rather—were nursing further maidens hypothetically smaller than themselves. The two most ancient of them all prepared luncheon for me. There was macaroni and there were sardines. Too oily, I think, the sardines. And there were small polypods interestingly fried, and cold boiled cauliflower and fried ducks' eggs like aureoles. And wine there was, and cheese, and fruit there was. And all the maidens that were sewing continued their sewing. But those that nursed the smaller maidens, or were nursed by them, followed every manipulation of my mouth with incredulity first, and then with radiant wonder. If I was at first embarrassed by all this maidenly concentration

upon my lips, and how they assumed one mould for the drinking of wine and another during the processes of mastication, and what the function of my teeth was in relation to the lips, and of the tongue in relation to the rest—this embarrassment passed speedily away. And never before nor since did I exercise these organs with so conscious a virtuosity. Nor ever before nor since conceived how sardines might be so oily and cauliflower so cold, and I, none the less, dine princelier than Crœsus and drink wine with more stimulation upon the palate and more approbation than Professor Saintsbury might achieve in the most learned of cellar-books. Ducks' eggs, what would you, and ducks' eggs such as these ! No, not wholly yet, is the story of Classe annulled !

PART II

PROMONTORIES

RIMINI—ANCONA—FOGGIA

I

SHOULD you desire to shed a tear for Francesca at Rimini, do not approach that city by way of Ravenna. If it could be conveniently arranged, close your eyes one night in Bacup, and open them next morning in Rimini, even in the Hotel Apulia there. Such humility as survived the cold cauliflower at Classe accompanied me as we coasted the Adriatic for an hour lucid as logic. The sea was enamelled with sails and the river at Rimini over which our train thundered was brilliant as a missal. I had no intention upon Rimini save the most obeisant humility. It started with the cross-eyed man who took me in hand at the station. Some gift of divination informed him that below my rucksack extended a patch of rheumatism which ached luridly. You cannot encompass the Ravennas of this world without paying your toll. I wonder how much the lovely girl that diverted me into the morasses by the mausoleum of Theodoric had to do with it? At all events, the cross-eyed man knew how little resistance there was in me. I had hardly opened my eyes upon Rimini than I was ensconced in a foul and glacial room at the Hotel Apulia and my unspeakable landlady and the cross-eyed tout were engaged in a violent controversy as to the amount of commission he was to receive for service rendered. At my very threshold, and my back aching desolately. No wonder Francesca was born to sorrow. It is true her father was Lord of Ravenna. But there was evidently something especially dangerous in the process of sub-

stituting Ravenna for Rimini. Still bickering, the landlady and the tout clumped down the stairs, and I stooped over the rucksack to remove soap and brushes. Three moments later I lifted my eyes to discover that impenetrable Lancashire had fallen upon Rimini. I could summon no adequate humility towards Malatesta's church, and the effort, no doubt, was the more severe in that I learned that he had despoiled that same gracious church of Sant' Apollinare in Classe to decorate his plaything withal. A little solace was brought to me by the spectacle of a band of Fascisti in a café poring over a catalogue of skull-and-crossbones, to determine which design would be bloodthirsty enough for them.

As for my bill at the Apulia next morning, I never beheld such mathematical ingenuity, nor a landlady so flinty under so gelatinous an exterior. I am certain the cross-eyed man is her illegitimate son, and that she bore such sons regularly and distributed them among the doorsteps of Rimini. With regard to her daughters, nothing could induce me to record the conclusion I came to regarding them. Many people would have been less charitable if they were given cold gutter-water to shave in, and then were charged for it. But to receive the same mixture *after* it had been shaved in, and to be informed that ' Coffee is ready,' this, I protest, was too much. I was not charmed with Rimini. Nor overwhelmingly with Ancona, the mist still lying heavy over roofs and shipping ; though I was now at length steering fast enough southward and sunward. I said previously that never was I not conscious on this journey to the African sea of the sun's immanence. But would it be fair, to

sun and sufferer, to include rheumatism? No wonder all the disadvantages of this third-class voyaging isolated themselves one after the other, and stood out in so clear a relief as the dull skies tolerated. So hideous and abandoned a slut came into our railway carriage as we bumbled towards Ancona, that if she was not another illegitimate daughter of the landlady of the Apulia I can't conceive who she might have been. Her hair dropped like weeds about the ribbed and furrowed neck. Every now and again she removed the hairpins and ranged them along the gash of her mouth, while she gathered the wisps together to crest her head with a bundle like a battered crow's nest. But most of her attention was taken up by her baby, whose face was all one sore. Miserable morsel of diseased flesh! Now she bared one breast, now the other, and the child sucked away dispiritedly. Or it would suspend the operation for no reason at all, and howl and howl. The mother's face contorted with uncontrolled hatred; she beat the child's shrunken body as if the thing had ceased to be human. And a moment later her mouth was at the child's mouth and nose and cheek, devouring them hungrily. Once more the breast, once more the hairpins ranged along the gash of the mouth, the storm-racked crow's nest of her hair.

II

I was perhaps precipitate in deciding that the frescoes that climb the arcade to the Madonna di San Luca at Bologna were the most odious in the world. I had not encountered the fresco that sprawls over the roof at the Restaurant Roma in Ancona. There are dancing

maidens plump out of the Hotel Apulia in Rimini, and they pelt each other with potato-peelings. There are fires burning upon altars, and nasty soldiers are seen in the dim distance beyond a perspective of pillars. They are advancing upon the maidens with intentions of rape, and that is why the maidens are legging it so seductively. Whose taste is the more pitiful, the maidens who hurl potato-peelings or the nasty lewd soldiers, I am not for deciding. But I am certain it would be bad business to transport here a fresco of Pinturicchio.

I climbed to the summit of Monte Guasco, the headland that impends over Ancona, and gazed disconsolately along the chalky distance. A funnel or two in the harbour, a roof or two in the city, and a dim hulk of citadel crowning the hill beyond. Here at my back stood the Cathedral of San Ciriaco, on the site of a temple of Venus. It was a dramatic thought that the pillars which held the roof over her orgies now support Christ's roof. Malatesta at Rimini was no less unscrupulous, where his own particular Venus flaunts over an altar with archi-angelic wings. Yet the very hill-top, here at Ancona, groans and wastes under this wedding of Venus and Virgin. The small plateau upon which the lions of the portal stare is heaped with masonry that comes snorting up hourly on a motor-tractor, and with this they hope to staunch the hollows gouged out by the centuries in the cliff's seaward face. Perhaps the secret subtle war of Venus and Virgin will be too swift for them. Yet there are others who say that the treaty of peace was signed long ago.

The *carabiniere* on duty on the hill-top had no views

to offer on that subject ; but he was rather more interesting on the subject of Shakespeare than most theorists I have met. At the moment of our meeting he was less occupied with the possibility of spies sketching and taking photographs of Ancona than with the behaviour of his children playing noisily between the two red lions of the portico, stuffing their jaws with orange-peel and pulling their granite tails. His eyes kindled with parental pride. Romeo and Giulietta, he informed me, their names were, and it was his intention to call his next child Otello or Rosalinda, according to its sex. If twins were destined him, male and female, he would confer both names, and thus make a notable addition to a collection which already included several characters out of the plays of Shakespeare.

I expressed my extreme gratification that he found our national poet worthy of such honour. He looked at me rather pityingly and said :

'National poet, *signore* ? Whose national poet ? '

'But surely,' I said, 'nobody but a few fanatical Germans has ever disputed the position of Shakespeare as the first of the English poets ? '

'After d'Annunzio,' he said sternly, 'Shakespeare is Italy's greatest poet.'

I rubbed my eyes and swallowed hard, and asked him to repeat the information. Certainly. After d'Annunzio, Shakespeare was Italy's greatest poet. I blinked again. 'The English appropriated Shakespeare on the morning they flew their flag over Malta ! '

'But allow me to prove. . . .' He waved me aside quietly and compassionately.

Take the list of his plays, he besought me. There are nearly twice as many plays about Italy as there are about England. He reeled them off. *Merchant of Venice*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens*. . . .

'Athens!' I objected smartly.

He circled his hands comprehensively. 'Athens, Rome, Rome, Athens. What would you?'

I stammered out an apology.

'*Two Gentlemen of Verona*,' he went on, '*Troilus and Cressida*, *Romeo and Juliet*. . . .'

At that moment the eponymous Juliet uttered a loud shriek. Romeo was poking her eye out playfully with my walking-stick. Readjustments followed and I leaned against a lion in the portico and wiped my brow. I had been reckoned among the Shakespeare scholars of my school, and had allowed them all to take me in—Dowden, Brandes, Stopes, Furnivall.

'*Signore*,' I cried out. I don't know if that is the proper way to address a policeman, but this was no ordinary policeman. At that moment I heard a hallooing from the isthmus by which the hill-top is approached. A woman was waving her arms towards him peremptorily. 'My wife,' he declared, not without traces of anxiety. It was indeed the potential mother of Rosalinda or Otello or both. I cannot say how much I regret her disturbance of this apocalypse.

When I looked out wanly towards the sunset, and discovered that here, on the eastern coast of Italy, the sun sank into *sea*, as if the whole peninsula were annihilated, I did not pause to argue it out. At all events, I comforted myself as I descended into the city again, the

Baconians are done in. But completely. One Shakespearean problem and another that had long eluded me, gave up its secret, and I was only aroused from my meditations by the voice of a boy crying. 'Seppe threw my soldo in the sea. Seppe threw my soldo in the sea. Seppe threw my soldo in the sea.' It was pure monologue. Nothing else at all occupied a corner in his consciousness. 'Seppe threw my soldo in the sea. Seppe threw my soldo in the sea.' I looked at the child more closely. He may not have been so ugly in repose, but the red eyes and flat nostrils and the twitching mouth made the sight almost too hideous to bear. It was chiefly the mouth which repelled and fascinated me. It was almost as big as the rest of the face, and curiously separate from it. The lips seemed to revolve independently upon their own axis, like a Catherine-wheel. And they were wormred against the bleariness of the face. They projected themselves, as it were, and writhed and twisted and rolled. 'Seppe threw my soldo in the sea.' A modern poet saw the nightmare fearfully reduplicated :

Mouth after mouth, each from the face escaped,
Still mouths and mouths that worked and gasped and gaped. . . .

Perhaps the child had become aware of my scrutiny. 'Seppe threw my lira in the sea. Seppe threw my lira in the sea.'

'Did he, or did he not, say a soldo?' I asked myself. 'I 'm sure it was a soldo.'

But the tune went on as if it were timeless as winds and waters.

'Seppe threw my lira in the sea.'

'Timon,' I groaned disjointedly, 'was a Greek, not an Italian. A Greek, not an Italian. A Greek, not an Italian.'

'Seppe threw my lira in the sea.'

I could bear it no longer. I produced the lira whose loss the homeless moonlike mouth was bewailing. The boy put out a paw and pocketed it, silently, as a hallstand accepts an umbrella. The face grew round the mouth, and a few hollow hootings proceeded from it, diminishing like an owl dropping into sleep. I strode away along the railway line, for this happened at the harbour's edge, among the trucks. Three minutes later I stopped suddenly. Did I, or did I not, hear a voice? A voice wailing at the water's edge?

I turned and crept back again in the shelter of a line of trucks, like a train thief. Then I paused, I listened:

'Seppe threw my soldo in the sea. Seppe threw my soldo in the sea. Seppe threw my soldo in the sea.'

I slunk away, and into the church of San Domenico.

The technique of these young people is worth study. Sometimes it becomes so consummate that it over-reaches itself, and their begging becomes an abstract art, performed entirely without reference to reward, like a good painter painting, or a poet making songs. There was a little lady in Rovigo (which is a junction for I have forgotten which city) and she preceded me by no more than a few feet, yet never impeding me. And she chirped: '*Ah, carità! Ah, carità!*' passionlessly. And still she hopped before me, as a robin will upon September dusks down English lanes. The child would have been em-

barrassed, I almost think, had I interrupted her wistful chirping to present her with a coin. For the same sort of reason the boy at Ancona had expressed no gratitude for my lira, simply because the money was irrelevant, almost impertinent. Whether I gave him a lira or no, Seppe *had* thrown his soldo into the sea.

Or hadn't he ?

In Capri they ask you for *francobolli*. What they would do with used postage stamps, if anybody ever gave them any, nobody can conceive. But what does that matter ? The request is made simply for the sake of requesting.

In Sicily, on the other hand, on the sophisticated eastern coast from Taormina to Syracuse, I am disposed to believe that when they offer you flowers they do, for all their sophistication, artlessly expect you to offer them money in return. 'Soldi, soldi,' they insist hungrily, pressing pink asphodel or purple comfrey upon you. You may be of those who consider that to receive Sicilian flowers from the hands of a Sicilian child is worthy of as much bounty as you can dispense. You will not be of that mind for long. When you have outworn that philosophy, let this be your mode of action. As soon as two children are seen approaching you (for they always hunt in pairs) holding in their sticky hands their scraggy bouquet of asphodel and comfrey, stoop swiftly down to meadow or hedgeside. Lift thence one solitary branch of ragwort or whatsoever dishevelled yellow weed grows in that place. Then approach the approaching children, proffering the weed to them, crying the while loudly, 'Soldi, soldi.' First you will behold them rooted to the

ground, as if they grew there, in the company of Jove's beard and blue borage. Then their jaws will drop. Then their dark Sicilian eyes will expand with horror. Then there will be as it were a sound of plants uprooted. And three seconds later their feet are twinkling over the golden meadow as if all Hell's devils were pursuing them. Upon the whole of that coastland there will be no more children approaching you with asphodel and comfrey, crying, 'Soldi, soldi!' Which you may consider something gained or lost, as it pleases you.

I said that I slunk into the church of San Domenico, to forget Seppe and the soldo and the young gentleman I could so willingly have flung into the sea to keep company with that same soldo. But I gazed upon the pulpit of San Domenico, and staggered to the door by which I had entered, as men stagger to the deck-rails on a vigorous Channel crossing. It has more than once occurred to me to wonder why travellers do not make a record of the really magnificently ugly things they see, as well as the beautiful things, their sunsets and Botticellis and pergolas. Has there not long been a flourishing cult of the worst lines in poetry? I proffer as my contribution the pulpit of San Domenico at Ancona. It is of wood, painted dingy white, and ornamented with obscene garlands. But its shape is its principal recommendation; flat, complacent, squat—a commode, precisely.

But this is not all I have to thank the young gentleman for that bewailed Seppe and his lost soldo. I was to learn you cannot crawl along harbour-side railway lines in modern Italy without incurring grave suspicion. I can find no other explanation for the behaviour of the

gentlemen who visited me late that night in my not strictly respectable hotel.

I lay in bed speculating whether the cultural interests of the *carabiniere* on the mountain might somehow be related with the Dorian Greeks who founded his city three thousand years ago. And perhaps Shakespeare himself had been a citizen of Ancona. The sonnets began to parade before me and each held out its key.

Suddenly there was a noise of ascending feet and a banging at my door. 'What is it?' I exclaimed, my heart in my mouth. 'This is the wrong number!'

'Let us in!' came sternly from without. 'Let us in! This moment!'

What hideous rumours had I not heard concerning these nocturnal visitations! My knees knocked. The stone struck against my feet like ice, as I slid from my bed. 'Who are you?'

Declared the voice of the innkeeper from without: '*Sono agenti*, police agents!' Whereon I to myself: 'I don't in the least like the sound of that!' Memories of the more savage episodes from the earlier cantos of the Fascist epic assailed me. Oh how deep is my loathing of castor-oil! My hands by this time were fumbling with the key. I opened the door. A blast of arctic air entered, and the *agenti*.

'Who are you? What do you want?' I asked, in a strange dry voice, my tongue furry. (They were wearing bowler hats. The thought struck me irresistibly that these were the 'bulldogs' who, when young gentlemen at Oxford misbehave themselves, go forward to announce a proctorial doom. Surely they would ask

—how could they not?—'Your name and college, sir?')

They did not. 'Let us see your passport!' In my nervousness I handed them my cheque-book. I realized my mistake with a stab of terror. I was now entirely at their mercy. They could make out that I had attempted, in addition to my other offences (whatever those might be), bribery and corruption of the officers of the law.

'Excuse me,' I cried brokenly. 'This is what I intended to show you! My passport!'

They sniffed at it suspiciously. There was nothing about me they had any affection for. They murmured together. I shall never know what divine instinct prompted me to my next action. It may have been a subconscious memory of the literary preoccupations of the *carabiniere*. It may have been the inspired mania of terror. I rushed over to my suitcase and fumbled wildly among the shirts for the manuscript of the book I was then engaged on.

'Look, gentlemen, look!' I cried piteously, thrusting the pages into their hands. '*Sono scrittore!* I am an author!'

A lovely change came over them, like the pine-tree of Atys clothed on with violets. Their suspicion blew from their faces like clouds before an April wind. Their policemanly eyes smiled upon me with a mixture of reverence and amiability.

'A writer, sir,' they said, 'a *scrittore*! It is a very great pleasure indeed to make your acquaintance. We cannot say how sorry we are to have disturbed you at

this unseemly hour. If we could but be assured of your forgiveness. . . .'

I bolstered myself up against the wash-stand. And only a moment ago I had been meditating a supplement to Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World.* If they kept me in prison long enough I might go back to the beginning again.

'The pleasure is mutual,' I assured them lordlily. 'I never met a police force that so engages my sympathies as the police force of Ancona. Good-night, gentlemen!'

They bowed themselves out through the doorway. '*Addio, signore. Tante belle cose! Scusi mille volte! Addio!*'

Now once more for that little business about Shakespeare and d'Annunzio—those eminent Italians! As for Ancona and its pulpits, or whatever else stimulates your supercilious disapproval, at all events they have a healthy appreciation of letters in Ancona. *Floreat!* say I.

III

I wonder if the dignity of the literary profession was responsible for the mark of deference paid me next morning at breakfast by the Albergo Torino. (I have learned subsequently that the least important function of this hostelry is to provide beds. Upon stating casually that this was the place I stayed at in Ancona, virtuous men and women have recoiled from me. But looking a second time into my eyes, they have taken comfort and continued the conversation.) It was at breakfast, I say, that they brought up to my bedroom the most

interesting table-knife of my experience. I am certain that no meal ever prepared at the Albergo Torino did not contribute its mite to the decorations of that knife. I am almost tempted to call the knife itself the decoration and the foods that encrusted it the substance. It was a complete gastronomic log-book of the institution, a palimpsest, if you will, from the peas that ornamented its blade to the fish-scales that had accumulated between blade and haft.

The pocket-knife with which the commercial travellers on the train between Ancona and Foggia sliced and impaled their salame was much less creditable. But they were so busy quoting the poems of Shakespeare's illustrious countryman, Gabriele d'Annunzio, that it was impossible to condemn them for it. It was impressed upon me that no commercial traveller I have met in Italy does not quote long passages from d'Annunzio. He would almost seem to be the guild poet of the commercial travellers. So interested was I in their quotations and in the aged widow from Ravenna, who sat in the corner opposite to me, that I do not know at what point we emerged from the mist that lay like Lancashire, as I have said, over the middle Adriatic. After two or three hours, I was aware of a sudden dazed realization that now indeed we were plunging towards the south and the sun, out of those middle and northern lands where the mists are. A few yards away were the white advancing breakers and a lazuline sea. I was conscious indeed that to the west forth-flung bastions of Apennine and Abruzzi succeeded each other, but I could not disengage myself from the protracted hypnotism of sea, excepting

to muse on the pallor of this noble lady from Ravenna, and how her features were gaunt as a St. Anne by Mantegna, or composed like a mosaic into a serene and sombre mask. Whether it was she or her city concerning whom I furtively set down these verses, or both of them, perhaps only herself could tell me, and all day long the white cavalry of the sea in their league-long lines marched forward, pawing the sand :

Once she was lovely.
You have seen
Birches when the wind was in them ?
And you knew not they were trees
Or things holier than these.
You have heard from over the dells
Bells, or a faint sprite of bells ?
There were flowers about, you said,
But there were no flowers to see.
Was it a thought of them that went
Through the lands where they had been
And the thought was more than scent ?

Once she was lovely, even she.
She was a queen of knightly men.
All her beauty is a ghost.

Once she was lovely, even she.
She is lovelier now than then.

Time and this long, low coast became interchangeable, unrolling like a double thread from some nucleus of blue and coral. I had not conceived it possible that level

foreshore might be so infinitely various. There was shingle that seemed, under the alchemic light, put together out of jade and malachite, chrysoprase (or shall we at length excuse chrysoprase ?) and porphyry and jasper, and every veined or pure marble, moonstone and onyx. Now a line of palms held the sky against a fleece of breakers. Here were soft lands dissolved by encroaching sea. There clumps of mosaic bulrushes nurtured who knows what fateful infancy. Hedges of tamarisk, and grey groves of olive to the limit of the sands. And Indian figs crazily growing out of themselves, thrust and parry of the agaves' swords. Shingle again, bulrushes, tamarisk, olive. . . . Oh, but Termoli !

I had all along decided to descend at Termoli, because the name attracted me. And when I saw an incredible city built on steep mediaeval walls overhanging the water, and when I saw its towers whitely challenging the sun, and the oranges in its gardens ; when I saw these things and a flight of gulls curving across the city like a harp, and sails burning far out at sea like candle-flames, I said to myself, ' Rise ! Walk the high streets of Termoli ! Drink the wine of Termoli under trellises of unbudded vines ! See what people they may be who come in to furl those shining sails, and hold up their nets on the quayside till the fish are a cascade of floundering silver. Rise ! ' I said, and again ' Rise ! ' But there was a trance upon me. The rhythm of the pounding piston had subdued me, the long low line of coast was coiled about me, I could not move.

And never shall I see Termoli, or drink its wine in cavernous bars where the sun does not enter in August,

nor under the vine trellises, nor anywhere at all in Termoli. And as for that donkey which was making full pelt over the sands towards a briny stream, the donkey with its two loaded panniers and the little boy that had walked beside it dozing, and waking suddenly, saw the beast's danger and bolted after it—woe is me, the train cut off boy and donkey and briny stream from sight. And I shall never know whether the donkey was overwhelmed in salt ooze like Pharaoh's hosts or whether the Lord clave the waters for the small boy's donkey's sake ; and the panniers, were they safely delivered with their load of figs and mandarins ? and the little boy, could he sit down comfortably that evening in Termoli, or did he prefer to stand to his macaroni many a day and night ?

Tell me not that Termoli would be a Termoli broken that was lissome in a dream. If Rimini was less than the dream of it, how much more was Rothenburg ! Was not even Foggia (concerning which the commercial travellers say, '*Foggia fuggi !*' and never have I heard a good word for it before or since), was not even Foggia a city breathless with beauty that evening, after all the world had bathed in such lymphs of sunset that you knew not whether it was earth you were walking on, or Venus or Mercury, or which planet at all.

A subsequent commercial traveller was at pains to assure me that the glamour with which I found Foggia invested was due either to defects in my vision or to the virtues of Foggia's wine. Hotly repudiating the second suggestion, I informed him that the mist at Rimini emphasized the defects of my vision, yet I had not invested that place with glamour. And that in any case two-thirds

of the qualities which make us most enthusiastic for El Greco are attributed by scientists to optic error on the part of the painter. But that finally all art is a sort of oblique vision—a refusal to look dead straight like cattle (granting the biology to be sound) or business men. He admitted the validity of all my arguments and was particularly impressed with the citation of El Greco. And perhaps, said he, Beethoven, being doomed to deafness, never heard straight, and that was why he was so exalted a musician. I did not know whether that was merely an Italian dig at German music. For did not music attain its last word in Donizetti? Yet granting all this, he said, there was no beauty in Foggia. The Galleria at Milan, now . . . and the Fiat works at Turin. . . .

But silver lay on the roofs of Foggia and sloped down the leaves of the palms on their moonward side, so that the shadow under them was ebony. Music was everywhere, guitars in the restaurants and brass at the street-corners. And at no moment could you not hear 'Eja-eja-alala!' hurtling down this street or any other. A Fascist deputy had been elected that day, and the streets were windy with banners. The whole of my amiable Hotel Bologna was ablaze with Fascist virtue, here more than elsewhere identified with the desirability of the House of Savoy. My landlord flourished the inevitable Fascist revolver and made the inevitable witticism about castor-oil—virtuous commodity, that has supplied a whole new facet to a nation's sense of humour! It was difficult to see why they should impute to themselves for righteousness a sentiment which popular impulse overwhelmingly urges upon them. There were no Italians who were

not Fascisti, and in those days you were driven to the conclusion that they only existed by taking in each other's castor-oil. Whom they shot was altogether too dark a mystery. Yet my host's ten-year-old son whom I dandled upon my knee dandled upon his own a most expert little revolver, fat as a slug and dry as an adder.

'Tell me,' I asked the landlord, 'what is really at the heart of Fascismo. In a few words, what are you driving at?'

His family started singing *Giovinezza*, the Fascist anthem.

'Quite so!' I said patiently. 'I have heard that before. Tell it me in prose, succinctly.'

'The glory,' said he, 'the glory of the *Casa di Savoia*!'

'But I can't help thinking that that isn't quite enough. There is something more intimate behind this unparalleled manifestation of energy than devotion to a dynasty, something nearer the heart and stomach. Since the Greeks busied themselves against the Persians, and the Parisians against the Bastille . . .'

'Exactly!' he caught up in fiery accents.

'Exactly!'

'Exactly!' his family repeated. Then breathlessly, one and all—father, mother, daughters, son, boots and cook, chambermaid and porter, launched themselves into the strains of *Giovinezza*. The guests in the hall took up the ditty and passed it up the stairs to the guests on the first floor. Thence it climbed up to the second floor and the third, hurled itself across the street, crackled and ripped to right and left, expended its further reverberations, died from the second floor and the first, ceased on

the lips of boots and chambermaid, host and hostess, and suspended itself upon the lips of my ten-year-old patriot in brilliant isolation.

'I see,' I said to the young gentleman's father. 'It is all clear now.'

Indeed, you cannot stand out for long against such a tide of exhilaration. But it was not until the procession passed under our balconies that I was wholly undone. The deputy was not to be allowed to make his way towards the station and Rome in ignominious silence, and all evening there had been more scurrying to and fro of motors than a whole general election entails in our less demonstrative country. There had been flaring of flambeaux and manœuvrings of bodyguards and evolutions in every sort of medium.

'The procession!' the landlord suddenly and arbitrarily exclaimed, cocking his ear.

'But there has been a procession all evening!' I objected.

'The procession proper!' he shouted, responsive to some particular modulation of the hubbub which had completely escaped me. 'To the balconies!'

There was a stampede up the stairs and through the state bedrooms.

'It comes!'

And there was no doubt of it. Far down that wide straight road the torches clustered like bees swarming. The motor-cars were clotting, all the bands blared into cohesion.

'It comes!'

How lovely in the clear southern night the torches

flared. How every balcony along the gem-clear street was pricked out with lamps. And then, as the procession attained this balcony and the next, how each exploded into pyrotechnic glories. How the shouting crept forward like waves, booming, retreating, booming louder, advancing, advancing! Till our own balcony split into streaks of lightning and burst into stars. And we too were overwhelmed in the sea of shouting. And I should have said that I was wiping the spray of it out of my eyes, had I not reminded myself I was speaking of a figurative sea. Or the smoke of our fireworks made my eyes smart. I only know that tears ran down my cheeks as I howled among my howling companions, suspended on our balcony between Orion and the Adriatic Sea. 'Mussolini! Mussolini! Long live Mussolini!' and embracing the cook and the chambermaid, *Giovinezza*, I sang, *Giovinezza*, *Primavera di bellezza!* till the last rocket on the remotest balcony soared and was extinguished in the throbbing air, and the Adriatic composed herself into silence again and Orion withdrew into his icy territories.

NAPLES

I

HAD it not been for the *agenti* of Ancona, I could not have resisted setting out from Foggia upon the Basilicatan and Calabrian adventure which I shall assuredly make some day. I felt myself under the moral obligation towards them of completing as early as possible the manuscript that had diverted their minds to so convenient a deference. Hence Naples, hence Capri, hence the anemones of Fontanelle, the primroses of Agerola. Hitherto, on my journey towards the *mezzogiorno*, I had not been able to repress the feeling that the cactus, the *fichi d'India*, had been deliberately planted by the Italian State Railway Company to impress such travellers as stumble upon their Adriatic route. Do not English railway officials decorate the minor stations with calceolarias and lobelias? My hypothesis seemed to fit admirably the impossible fantasy of their growth. How could Nature herself be responsible for these oblique sproutings, these top-heavy gesticulations? Not that the railway companies as reformed by Mussolini had any hand in it; but it struck me that the manipulation of the *fichi d'India* was precisely the occupation that had absorbed the attentions of those armies of fathers-in-law, sons-in-law, cousins and personal acquaintances whom every railway official in Italy had formerly attached to his permanent personnel. How more admirably while away the tedium that preceded the train's arrival and minister to the exhaustion that followed its departure? I could envision *fichi d'India* competitions between the

staffs of Pescara and Termoli, and Termoli carrying off the crown of wild agave. Now the rumour came from Bari that a new seccotine had been discovered to make the leaves stick to the trunks in attitudes still more pathological. Now Termoli countered by the invention of a pattern which made all previous arrangements seem as unadventurous as a bucket. Then in burst a courier from Cotrone. 'Masters,' he panted. . . .

But the promiscuity of the plant in the great plain beyond Foggia brought an end to these speculations. No, the *fichi d'India* grew unplantedly as our own nettle. Not even the lava vases presented to my notice some hours later by the gentleman opposite to me in the carriage, abated my disappointment. I disliked their shape, surface, colour and texture equally.

'Made,' said he, 'out of the lava of Vesuvius proper. There, opposite us!'

I lifted my eyes. Vesuvius looked unbelievably like other mountains that have a fancy for wrapping their pasha heads in a turban of cloud.

'I don't like Vesuvius,' I said with sudden instinctive conviction. And I don't. It may be the fault of Etna and Stromboli, which are volcanoes and no mistake about it. It may be the fault of Thomas Cook's funicular railway. I tell myself vainly that it is silly to call it a fake volcano. What would you do, I ask myself reprovingly, if something had induced you to spend the night at Torre del Greco, round the bay there? And the *facchino* knocked at the door, and you could hear through the panels his own teeth and his own knees knocking together independently, and he said, '*Signore*, the volcano

is in eruption !' And you put your feet to the floor and found it already six inches deep with little grey *lapilli*, and you looked through the window and saw a stream of molten lava which had already engulfed the greengrocer's shop at the corner. And fiery clouds plunged across the sky blindly . . . and . . . *but*, I am convinced, in the first place, that nothing could ever induce me to spend a night at Torre del Greco, and, secondly, I flatly refuse to believe that the *facchino* would do any such thing as pause to warn me of my danger. And finally, I am not at all certain that the evidence of Pliny the Younger is sufficient to disprove the suspicion that Messrs. Thomas Cook and the American Express Company did not themselves construct Vesuvius as a commercial speculation (their most flourishing, I wager); and who can say dogmatically that they don't go off secretly to Pompeii every midnight with a cartload of properties, for the precise purpose of their disinterment next morning?

Am I guilty of inadequate humility towards Pompeii and Vesuvius—an offence I have previously censured severely? Convince me that my suspicions are unworthy, and I shall clothe me in lava and ashes. Nor will I say that the Bay of Naples is a fake bay, any more than that Paolo Veronese and Sir Herbert Tree were a fake painter and a fake actor respectively. But there is no doubt at all that it is the most theatrical bay in the world. It was not without a sense of stage values that Messrs. Cook and the American Express Company elected that particular region for the theatre of their pseudo-volcanic labours, else why did they not plant

Vesuvius in Lincolnshire? Would you have a bay entirely innocent of melodrama, vast and grave and simple? Mudros, then, or Syracuse. But Naples. . . . Surely there can be no more convincing proof of the American Express-Thomas Cook theory regarding the origin of Vesuvius than this: if there were at this moment no Vesuvius in the Bay of Naples it would be the obvious duty of these gentlemen to set to work immediately and provide one.

II

After Vesuvius, the most prominent circumstance of Naples is the German *Wandervogel*, that 'elemental fowl' as the poet Branford might name him. So, in Rome, only St. Peter's takes precedence of him, and in Turin, only the Fiat works. It is difficult to suppress the feeling that the community of these wander-birds is hardly less numerous throughout Italy than the community of the Fascisti themselves. They it is in Venice who supply those traditional tones which the Venetians themselves, intent on their sashes and skull-caps, have allowed to lapse from the picture. They it is who complain from gondolas under the casements of the palaces, strumming the guitar. If they do it professionally for money, poor youths, their predecessors did it professionally for love, and it amounts to the same thing, excepting that the protestations issue nowadays from cloudier recesses of the larynx. Almost from my first meeting with them many months ago in Cologne—I exclude pre-War encounters with them, for though their trappings be the same, their spirit is radically altered—their principal

effect upon me has been tears. Otto of Cologne comes back to my mind vividly, carrying my luggage for me, despite all his velvet coat, flounced open collar and fine-spun hair. It humiliated me to see so decorative a creature doing casual porterage.

'And what do you do,' I asked, 'when there is no coal and there are therefore no trains?'

He pointed to his rucksack and the toes of a pair of boots that protruded from it. '*Laufen!*' said he. '*Ich tue umlaufen!*'

My German was feebler then than now, and I translated '*laufen*' (by which he meant 'I tramp about rather aimlessly') as, 'I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart'—that sort of sentiment.

'He runs!' I exclaimed to my friend, 'he runs! Those are his running shoes! He just runs, for the glory of it!'

Now my friend was from Marlborough, and the quotation was of course irresistible. And he no doubt divined that if he did not give tongue, I should speedily. His voice throbbed with remembered and renewed emotion:

He runs because he likes it
Through the broad, bright land.

I have no doubt at all that since then Otto has run for all he is worth to Italy. The ranks of the wander-birds have been recruited mainly from those middle and professional classes whose means consisted of the pre-War mark. They are the unhappy people who were thrown by the mark's collapse into an absolute indigence that the

rise of the Renten-mark but lamentably confirmed, and they are to be carefully distinguished from those stout commercial gentlemen and their stouter ladies who have for so many months been so luxuriously wallowing in every hotel-lounge across the length of Italy. I discussed these wander-birds with a Jesuit priest in the grounds of the 'Stella Matutina,' the famous Catholic academy of Feldkirch in Austria. On the whole he deplored them bitterly. He found them animated by a recrudescence of that primeval German spirit which haunted groves and forests, and engaged in such ceremonies there as a Christian priest of the same race could only recall with loathing. It was precisely from that twilight that Christianity had come to redeem them, substituting basilica for grove. Of course a certain section of the *Wandervögel* was affiliated with Catholic bodies, and little danger was to be apprehended from that quarter. But there was a second and much more numerous body which so far from concealing the fact that they were propagators of the doctrine of Free Love, gloried in it, philosophized upon it, wrote novels about it. Finally, there was a third section . . . the priest set his jaw and his steel-blue eyes darkened. He did not continue the theme.

For my part I did not find them anything like so sinister, at all events in Italy, whither quite large congregations of them had drifted. I found them pathetic and humourless, and if I had been inclined to look upon them respectfully for the blonde beasts that they were, they needed but to cluster about the base of Cellini's 'Perseus' in Florence to assume a juster proportion. So firm and

joyous and Mediterranean was Perseus, so loose, relaxed, and defeated were they. And once again, but for the last time, I mopped my eyes and called down malediction upon Poincaré. Not the last time, I mean, that I called down malediction upon that statesman. But I did not again sob pitifully when they raised their voices in song, nor did I furtively invite them to take macaroni in some secluded *trattoria.*

When I first heard the strains of '*O Strassburg, O Strassburg, du wunderschöne Stadt!*' ascending mournfully that evening in Naples from the heart of a crowd in the Piazza Dante, my first instinct was one of acute fear, implanted in my bosom by this same velvet-coated Otto. I had seen him again some months after our introduction in Cologne in his native city of Dresden, and we had gone forth singing together. That is, he and certain of his *Wandervögel* brothers sang, and I wept. But so carried away was I at one time by the guitars and the voices, that I felt I too must burst into German song, or be dumb for ever. There was only one song I remembered, and I put all my frustrated passion for singing into it. All my life long, whenever I had attempted to sing, my friends had treated me very harshly, and I felt that these *Wandervögel* must respond to the spirit at least of my singing, however rudimentary they found its technique. So I expanded my breast and proclaimed aloud :

> '*Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles,*
> *Über Alles in der Welt.*'

Now my singing on all previous occasions had been

succeeded by active, by even violent behaviour. I could not have conceived possible so appalled a silence as succeeded my wistful attempt at musical self-assertion in Dresden. My heart fluttered dismally like a bird that suddenly realizes it is caged.

'Why, why,' I asked myself, 'did I try it on with these of all people, the most musical in the world? A fraction of a note flat or sharp (or whatever the idiotic distinction may be) and their ear-drums bleed for days. Besides . . .'

But it was not that. When the blood had returned to his lips, Otto explained.

'You know that Dresden is the very heart of Communist Saxony?'

'Yes?'

'These imperialist songs, these songs of the bad old order? Don't you understand? They are *am strengstenst verboten*!'

I understood. I grasped his hand fervently for having saved me who knows from what doom. I looked round fearfully, none the less, to see if any Communist agent were at hand, taking down notes. . . . The *Wandervögel* resumed their singing. In half an hour they were in full swing again, and I was forgiven. 'Was there any other song,' somebody asked, 'I'd like them to sing?'

I thought hard, remembering the Modern Sixth, and what songs they sang, while *we* chanted the choruses from Hecuba.

'*Strassburg*,' at length I suggested timidly, '*du wunderschöne Stadt*.'

'*Ausgeschlossen*,' they replied unanimously. 'Impossible! Political songs are forbidden!'

'Political? How?'

'It sounds like a reflection,' explained Otto, 'on the Treaty of Versailles, and although the Communists and the National Socialists hold similar views about Alsace-Lorraine, it is better not to sing political songs, much better . . . till we know where we are.'

All over Germany—this phobia regarding the singing of patriotic songs:

'*Wir bitten dringend*'—read the notices on the Rhine steamers—'*das Singen Patriotischer Lieder auf dem Schiffe zu unterlassen*,' lest the ship's officials co-prosecutable be. Altogether a tearful business, were there not this element of humour that springs from the humourlessness of it. All of which explains why my first instinct was one of fear and flight that evening in Naples when I heard the beauties of the equivocal city of Strassburg extolled.

'Politically I don't suppose it matters, even if they sing *Deutschland über Alles*,' I reassured myself in the Piazza Dante that evening, urging my way into the crowd. 'Violin, voice, and guitar—the usual combination! But I can't help thinking it a little invidious to proclaim, here in the heart of Naples, the wonder-beauty of Strassburg!'

I tried to be superior and cynical for several minutes, but my knees weakened in the old sickening manner. These people have the infallible recipe for tears. Who could withstand, under a Neapolitan moon, the *Volkslieder* of Schumann or *Drei Lilien* or *Am Rhein, am heiligen Ströme* . . .?

They are schooled in the swift discernment of those tears their art has evoked. In five minutes we were engaged in conversation, in ten I found I had invited them to a dish of macaroni in a *trattoria* hard by. 'Without any meat in the sauce?' they insisted apprehensively. Not a gramme of meat was to desecrate it. Arrived at the greasy little tables of the eating-house, their first duty was to divide into three punctilious heaps the load of copper and nickel which Karl, the youngest of them, had collected in his velvet hat. '*Carità*!' he had demanded, 'a few soldi for charity's sake!'—this tall, able-bodied youth, not quite twenty-three. I recalled the robin-twitterings of the little lady of Rovigo, far less purposeful than these. They were a typical party of *Wandervögel*. Karl had been an art student in Berlin, the others had been medical and law students respectively in Bremen and Augsburg; the one bond of unity I could discover between them was a certain ferocious nihilism. They objected to smoking, drinking, and meat, not like Hampstead theoreticians, but with the ferocity of a Savonarola. The law student from Augsburg was young, but bald and very ugly; it was quickly evident that he hated Karl with such an intensity that I could not understand how they had wandered from frontier to frontier without breaking of bones. But when the cook at the *trattoria* presented them with their dish of macaroni, and they found a few grains of meat distributed about the tomato-sauce, all their hostility was diverted against the woman, and from her upon the macaroni. They writhed. They put their fingers before their eyes. 'Take it away!' they screamed.

I am convinced it was purely psychopathic. For years they had so vainly ached for wine, meat, and cigarettes that their passion curdled in them and became sour. When the French retire from the Ruhr, they will, I am certain, tolerate these commodities again. They talked of their present occupation with so curious and complete a candour, that my heart ached. Was it conceivable that young Englishmen of their education, reduced to their condition, would discuss the technique of beggary with so little self-consciousness? *There*, not in the loss of provinces, not in political degradation of this sort and that, but in pride fallen in the dust and licking it, *there* was the War's real tragedy. In the Campagna, said they, if you got a little fruit to your bread you were lucky; and in Lombardy, anywhere near the big towns, they 'd make you pay for your night's doss, if it was no more than a few centesimi. But the country between Perugia and Terni, there was the *Wandervögel's* paradise. In all that Apennine valley it was a bad day's work if you didn't get a hefty dish of macaroni thrown in at the end of it, not to mention a bed in the family's own room if they had more sons than daughters.

They took me to their present Neapolitan doss-house, in the most malodorous purlieus of the port. We climbed countless pitch-black stairs, and my arms winnowed before me against the fume of garlic. More than once I slipped upon vegetable-peelings and might have fallen back upon the chasm below had they not flung out an arm to support me. We entered a long low attic, whose windows were either bleary with a fog of sweat or smeared with a dingy wash. There were perhaps forty beds

supported against the walls or venturing out into mid-room if it was thought they had legs enough to stand on. Most of them consisted initially of an iron framework, but more and more planks and boxes had been called in to bolster up their collapse. Here and there the wide red lips of negroes dilated into the half-light, out of their drunken stupor. There were a few wizened little Italians crouched over charcoal braziers, for all the stifling stuffiness of the place. They looked furtively out of the corners of their eyes when any one approached them, and growled, like a dog who has made off with a bone. We wound our way across the room and stood beside the most ruinous erection in it—it would be cynical to call it a bed.

'Here we sleep!' said they.

I caught my breath. 'Not all three of you together?'

'What else?' they asked. 'We are not "gentlemen" any longer.' They used the English word.

I remembered again this abnormal hatred of the law student for the artist—night after night their bodies thrust together in festering dens like these!

'We pay one lira seventy-five for the three of us. It took two days,' said the medical student, 'to knock off those twenty-five centesimi!'

'And we've tried,' added the law student, 'for four weeks to get it knocked down to one-fifty. If you heard the noise she makes, you'd think . . .'

'You'd think,' the medical student said, 'she was having twins.'

'We'll get it reduced to one-fifty yet,' interrupted the artist confidently. There was no doubt that they would.

My eyes had fallen upon their three rucksacks ranged along the sacking which covered their bed. 'Aren't you afraid,' I asked, 'to leave your things about when you go out?'

'Nobody's ever stolen anything from us yet. Nobody.'

That was the moment at which I realized the full depth of their degradation. Not even Neapolitans permitted themselves to rob them.

Some days later I met them again. We had both, it seemed, visited Solfatara at about the same time. (They occupy the daytime in 'doing' the sights just as rigorously as their parents did in happier circumstances.)

'At what time,' they inquired, 'were you there?'

'It must have been between four and five.'

'We were there between two and six. How is it we didn't meet? Surely you didn't pay five liras to go on to the crater?'

'I suppose I must have done.'

'Well, of course, we climbed up from the outside and spent our time on the rim of the volcano. Catch us paying five liras.'

'Half a day's work,' I agreed sympathetically. 'But between two and six? What did you do with yourselves on the rim of a volcano all that time?'

But before I quote their reply, it is important to be clear as to the quality of Solfatara. Should I say the 'Phlegrean Fields' perhaps I need no further eloquence, or do I add that not far from here the leaden waters of Avernus lie. For Solfatara is a half-extinct volcano in that desolate region to the west of Naples which conveys

to the mind a horror like the empty eye-sockets of the moon, envisioned in nightmare. Perhaps that landscape is now the more terrible because of those blue bays and golden cliffs at its verges which emphasize a desolation but little relieved by the dubious vineyards that find a footing in its interspaces. It is as if some sickness had ravaged the land's face till it peeled like a leper. About a living volcano there is vigour and magnificence ; a dead volcano, like a skeleton, is so abstracted from its functions that the mind must work with anxious sentimentality to send the luxury of a shudder down the spine. But about a half-dead volcano there is the indeterminate horror of limbo, a sick dilemma : are we at the end of its anguish ? or will it gather its evil powers together, if only for a last time, and howl hideously into the sun's face ?

Such are the sensations that accompany you over the quaking crust of Solfatara, across the fissures that sprout into fumes of sulphur, among the wells whose boiling mud heaves and slaps against their sides.

'What did you do with yourselves on the rim of a volcano all that time ? '

'We ? We were quite happy. *We played ball with each other !* '

I paused. I said not a word for many minutes. Gradually a picture established itself behind the fumes of sulphur which choked along the chambers of my mind . . . the broad stairways of the fake Walhalla, its high doors and hygienic slippers and the tiles and the cornices,

and the dark Danube carving below among the forests, in Germany, away in humourless Germany.

'The Walhalla by Regensburg!' I shrieked suddenly. 'There will be busts for you also, by Lessing and Bismarck, Frederick and Struwwelpeter!' And my ribs cracked with laughter, and tears—always tears—rolled from my eyes, and the Neapolitans in the café—for they have a sense of humour in Naples and they took it for granted that something funny had happened—joined me in my laughter, and the German *Wandervögel* looked upon me gravely with wide eyes and did not realize—as then at last they might have done—why their race lost the European War.

I had no doubt at all that the Walhalla of Regensburg made their failure inevitable; it would have occurred earlier if our language (and the French) contained a term to define the concept 'humourlessness.' I am forced to use this word because none other exists to express that spiritual quality at the opposite pole of 'humour.' Neither 'humourlessness' nor 'non-humour' meets the case at all, for the particular condition is not by any means purely negative. It is just as positive as 'humour' itself. If there had been a term to express this antithesis, it could have been taken into account during those psychological offensives which, during this War as during all others, were so much more potent than the physical. My *Wandervögel* playing ball with each other in the Phlegrean Fields were this quality in action. But it has its perpetual monument in that foolish glacial Walhalla looming over the Upper Danube. Those twisted forests and melancholy uplands, those skies ruinous with

staggering cohorts of sunset, that river like slow blood where armies waned and ceased—well might that landscape be the legendary home of the supernal German heroes whose beards held the gloom of these same forests and who shouted together in battle as the winds might on these hill-tops. And here, and *here*, to erect their pundit Parthenon and call it 'Walhalla,' this mean, soulless, pedantic image of a temple erected to confront what different skies and to house what different gods—I ask you, if architecture be frozen music, what laborious bumblings of paunched professors are congealed here into stone!

As I have intimated, you must take your shoes off as you pass through the fake-bronze doors. (I do not mean that the bronze is not as expensive as you can buy. But it is all fake-bronze, fake-marble, cornice and pediment, frieze and entablature—fake, fake!) And this hero or the other is pointed out to you, this lawyer, this princeling, this butcher . . . and should you ask for Spinoza, for instance, a German not undistinguished in the courts of European intelligence, '*Echt Deutsch*,' they insist. '*Wir sind echt Deutsch in Walhalla*.'

A German-American entered as I did, and assumed his hygienic slippers more awefully than any Muslim in Mecca. He slid from bust to bust, he fingered the pillars, blinked upward at the ceiling, and his throat flickered as if there were gills there. Then he came over to me. He 'd been to Cairo, he said, and Constantinople had seen him. He 'd done Paris, he 'd done Rome, he 'd done Venice. He 'd been to that tin-pot show called Athens; there was no little burg on this globe he

hadn't got taped. But if this li'l contraption didn't knock spots off all of them rolled into one ball, he was no hundred-per-center ! From which I gathered that he approved of the building that contained us. Then it was that a body of *Wandervögel* appeared at the portals. Their hair was more than usually tousled, and their bosom more than usually exposed, their shorts unduly abbreviated ; in a word, they gave the impression of being rather less clothed than if they wore no clothes at all. As they wandered round the building, their honest faces were transfigured with awe, my friend, in the meanwhile, becoming more and more speechlessly indignant. The indecency of it, and what was more, the sacrilege, made him puffed and purple. Profaning the sanctity of the world's prime temple with their irreverent nudity, when they might have approached with bowler hats and removed them at the threshold. 'Pah !' he snorted.

I thought for a moment of trying to make him see that these youths were the only honest business in the place. Completely taken in, like my friend himself, of course they were. But there was some aptness in the garments wherein *they* celebrated Walhalla ; nor were they hopelessly far removed in type and even in vesture from those very Germanic heroes whom their elders had so elaborately exorcized from this landscape. At least the deshabille of the heroes, in their off-times between a battle and a battle, was probably the subconscious 'idea' of the costume worn by their post-War posterity. I became too occupied with my thoughts to express them. I felt how eagerly these young men would get down on their

knees and perambulate on them if they were given the least encouragement, in the manner familiar at St. Peter's. They hardly moved. They hardly breathed. There was no sound in that hushed temple save the German-American snorting faintly at my side.

Then suddenly my eyes were attracted by a swift gesture on the part of the smallest and darkest of the *Wandervögel*. He flung his left arm outward suddenly, lifted his head, and bellowed. Oh the young man bellowed like a bull, bellowed gloriously, incredibly. The custodian, the German-American, the other *Wandervögel* stared upon him. Their eyes were glass.

And the bellow ceased. And the young man turned on the heels of his sandals and fled like anything.

But as for me, I had understood. It was a trumpet-note declaring the dawn of a sense of humour in the new generation of Germany. The walls of Walhalla had not fallen stone from stone. But they will, assuredly they will.

III

I lingered all that evening at Pozzuoli, the fishing village under Solfatara, and within a long tram-ride from Naples. Heavy streaks of Pompeian red lay across Baiae and Ischia as I descended. The Phlegrean Fields smoked like tropic swamps. But never had Solfatara in its prime known such red energy as this of Pozzuoli. How the human lavas boiled and the sulphurous fumes assailed the nostrils! What is the secret of this Italian fecundity, which only increases in the ratio of its expenditure, so that the ninth son seems the issue of more potent

loins than the first ? I remember little towns in Provence, in Brittany. How dead they seem when I think of these intense crowds in Pozzuoli, who had the more fervour in reserve the more they exercised it. A donkey limped home to its stable on three legs, one hoof being hideously lacerated. A band of small boys followed, uncontrollably amused. The incident illuminated the problem. If you allow such a spectacle to penetrate the fraction of an inch behind the eye, it sets up all sorts of lamentable secretions. You become sorry for the animal. You experience something of its pains, transferring the laceration of its hoof to your own heel. It interferes with your digestion and with your prerogative of blissful sleep. But if such a picture as this hopping donkey remains only upon eye-level, it will be seen to be, as these children saw it, quite too too funny. What a jolly hop, skip, and jump it performs, the hoof bleeding under the bleeding sky. And when its owner pricks its haunches from behind with a nail, what a comic little start it makes, every tendon stiffening under the skin, then relaxing again. Now and again the three legs seem to get out of *rapport* with each other, and the beast looks like collapsing. But above all, that fourth unoccupied limb, how hilarious it is, the way it kicks out in dabs and thrusts, as if to slough the agony like a skin.

There 's the road royal towards healthy progeny, say I ! None of these pestilent secretions ! How else could the little boys have marketed their polypods efficiently under the naphtha-flares ? Polypod, so much the kilo ! But these fleshy tentacles will keep oozing out of the brown paper bags and fastening themselves round

the upright of the balances. Or the whole livid pink body follows, panting and throbbing for the sea. The eye is dilated for the coral groves. Oh cool sands where we lay, and the small fry knew not were we mere weeds or those avengers of fishy sins whom Great God Whale assigns equally to shark and sprat. Plop! goes the polypod over the quay's edge. Thwack! goes the fishmonger's fist into the ear of his young assistant. He will not be caught napping again. 'Three kilos, *signora*?' Half a polypod too much. He lifts the thing to his mouth, bites out its eye, and swallows it. The tentacles fasten convulsively about the child's wrist, and poke questingly into the torrid air.

'Great God Whale, wherein lay my sin, that, like Oedipus Tyrannus, the socket of mine eye bleeds?'

The child has now a satisfactory hold. He inserts his thumb into the place where the eye was (you would hardly call it a socket) and tears the polypod in two. '*Grazie, signora!*'

One tiny lad sat in the darkness of a doorway, and him neither the performing donkey amused nor did a diet of the eyes of polypods irk him. So sad he seemed, so threadbare, so withdrawn from all this tumult of Pozzuoli. What sort of conceit, of odious self-indulgence, is it that from time to time makes us give alms not to them that demand it, but to some fortuitous misery for whom, during that moment at least, begging was the last thing it contemplated? Is it perhaps some remote refluence from Lucifer's primal sin? Do we, for one moment of titan heresy, desire to be God . . . a sudden stooping out of the concave of darkness?

Another tiny lad came and sat in the doorway by the first. They said no word to each other, but one solemnly withdrew from his pocket a cigarette-end, yellow as the garbage from which he had rescued it. It yielded them five puffs each. Solemnly they spat, forward, sideward. Then the second lad went away again, and once more the first was sad, threadbare, alien.

'You shall be God!' said Lucifer in me.

I took out a five-lira note, not less, from my wallet, and stuffed it into the child's hands. Then I walked away swiftly, aware perhaps of Lucifer at my ear. As for the child, surely he would rise like a spray of Solfatara and dissipate under the tall crater of the street? Five liras, *five* liras! Ten minutes later I returned. The child sat in the darkness of the doorway, motionless. So lies a lizard taut upon his rock. Was that a leaf that stirred, a hawk's wing? I conceived myself the child. What paralysis of horror seizes limb and heart when suddenly inanimate darkness thrusts wealth like this into the hand? What wickedness lies behind it? No calculable copper coin, such as your uncle has given you occasionally, or you have stolen more than once; but this paradoxical substance, this paper no lordlier than much gutter-merchandise, yet capable of being converted into so many cigarettes, a lump of chocolate, a packet of cakes, and Luigi and Piero will stare at you with envious hostile eyes! How much does a bicycle cost? . . . Or must I take it to the *padre*? There is something evil in it, unhallowed. Must I take it now, at once? How shall I explain it?

Pozzuoli seemed the aquarium of Naples made flesh,

such deep-sea odours were about me, such waters seemed to engulf me. The stars seemed refracted, dissipated, enlarged, by intervening glooms of sea. I recalled that yellow fairy creature, all limbs, that proceeds with illimitable complication of movements upon its tangled orbits ; the fish that moved, like statesmen, backward and forward impartially, with a sublime disregard of consistency ; certain fish borne like a paper boat of Shelley on fragile gossamer sails, certain others heavy as lapis lazuli afloat. And when these paused and stared you in the face, what astounding resemblances to your personal acquaintance became manifest—here an undershot lip, there a villainous brow, a deceitful oblique eye. And—who would have thought it—precisely that curve in the left corner of the mouth which redeems my dear friend Bilkin's face (it had better be Bilkin) from insipidity. Who could have it in his heart not to pity the poor fish that must needs react with an electric shock whenever its button be pressed ? It had worked so hard all morning, and was reduced by now to a very exiguous voltage. Yet still it bit its lips and mobilized the failing current whenever the *custode* bringing round some tourist worthy of special attention appealed to its sense of loyalty. Nor could you any the less sympathize with the jelly-fish, so evidently conscious of their own low state of evolution, that kicked out their legs, or hands, or whatever organs they were, or were not yet quite, in a pathetic effort to quicken the process. (All save that amethyst-streaked beauty that was so content to resemble a banana sliced vertically, that it made no effort at all to improve its status.) And most of all, that evening in Pozzuoli, I recalled those

phantasms—turn your back on them and you do not believe they really exist—that are half crabs, and half fleece-lined gloves ; their hungers and lusts . . . there is no vice in all Kraft-Ebbing they do not perform : incest, autophagy, these the crudest of them. So that all my own organs seemed to put forth tentacles, and my head to be converted into a fleece-lined glove, closing in upon itself, and all my parts seemed to embrace, or languorously to devour, each the other.

It is interesting to compare the comments made upon these objects by the representatives of the two races for whose diversion Providence has expressly designed them —the English and the Americans. 'Aren't they *funny* !' said the English, of such nightmarish monsters that Bosch would not have admitted them to his canvases as being too ludicrous for contemplation. Or perhaps the young lady would realize that the words had not done her sentiment justice. '*Aren't* they funny, Letitia !' she would add inventively, '*aren't* they funny !' Or of some radiant star-fish that might put to shame the tire of Semiramis. '*Too* sweet ! Isn't it, daddy ? Just *too* sweet !' And then from a far corner America would pick up the tale ; but I felt that the tamest of the expressions on the lips of America was more extravagant than the most grotesque creature the Mediterranean depth had yielded.

'The bodies of these marine monsters,' I murmured in the aquarium-air of Pozzuoli, 'were fantastic enough. But what shall be said of these humans ? What parodies they are, drawing their stumps or their excess of members along the aptly crooked streets ! Yet not the most

outrageous of those others is so far divorced from the fishy norm (which, after all, is the sardine) than these half-animate human lumps. What versions and perversions of the soul's norm exist in even the more orthodox bodies, is too deep a catacomb for me to penetrate.'

And all night long my mind burrowed in those galleries, and ever and anon turned fearfully whence it came, groping for light and air. But next morning, if there were dews at all, such discoveries as were vouchsafed to me were drawn upward with them, and the sun's eye opened upon clean mountains and candid seas, Naples between them uninfected by either virginity.

IV

Consider for a moment what pictorial art is provided for the Neapolitan young. One picture was particularly eloquent, and was evidently so popular that it overflowed the counters of the picture-dealers and might be bought with your candlesticks, macaroni, or stockings, wherever the morning's shopping had led you. The masterpiece represented three demure Neapolitan lads, twelve to fourteen years old. That they were smoking and drinking with gusto need hardly be stated ; but they were playing cards, I grieve to say, and for money too. Yet even this might have been condoned. But when you saw that the youngest and most innocent of those children had secretly advanced his naked foot to the second most innocent, and that he conveyed the ace of trumps between his toes, you felt that Wordsworth would have modified the 'Ode upon the Intimations of Immortality,' had he resided in Naples at the time of its composition. The point was

that there was no suggestion of disapproval about the picture. Far from it. Both the artist and his numerous public had nothing but a good-humoured admiration for the ingenuity of the innocent young gentlemen. 'Go ye and do likewise!' You will see these children in fullest action in the high-vaulted Galleria, which is the focus of the amenities of Naples. Here the officers throw their blue cloaks more royally about them; the students swaggering in their pink-peaked caps, look as if they had stepped out of a canvas by Uccello and liked it too much to dream of returning. And the young gentlemen selling papers or shining shoes, or pursuing less formal occupations, make the whole place reverberate like a crowded swimming-bath. It is amusing to trace the echoes of their separate cries as they rebound from the roofs and are twisted into vocal shapes still stranger than when they set out upon their journey; and still more to realise how we that sit at the tables outside the *cafés* are tabulated in a hierarchy of possibilities. This one may bounteously leave the dregs of his beer undrunk. This one may generously forget to tread on the stump of his cigarette. This one may, if you look forlornly enough at him, be touched for a twenty-centesimi piece. But this one . . . hush, you lads! . . . he 's a tourist and has had rather more to drink than he can stand. You see how his jacket-pocket is gaping? He may have stuffed into it, his . . . hush, you 'll put him on his guard! Yes, so carefully tabulated in our orders of potentiality, that many a dramatist would give his eyes for so unerring an intuition of character. Indeed, are not those orders enumerated by Dionysius, the Areo-

pagite, of seraphim, dominations, princedoms, and the later orders of saints major and saints minor and beatifics and venerables—are not all these ultimately tabulations less in reference to intrinsic merit than in reference to some potentiality of human kindness? Precisely parallel to the system of the young men (the young ladies should not be ignored) in the Galleria? The most agile of these Neapolitan urchins was a one-legged child adding the staccato echo of his wooden stump to the conflict of shadowy noises in the vault. On what more than usually bold adventure did mishap come to him? Poor child, not with that leg at least will he ever again pass over to his heart's companion the ace of trumps between toe and toe!

This levity in the contemplation of sin which the picture I have spoken of attests is the obverse of the medallion. Its reverse is the anguish with which they contemplate religion. It is an anguish of the features, not of the spirit; once again, an emotion on eye-level. Take the statues of Christ in every shop window, either placed there for tutelary purposes, or for sale simply. So liberally bespattered with blood are they, that hardly any white flesh survives. The effectiveness of the blood is in direct ratio with its economy, but that sort of aesthetic does not prevail under Vesuvius. It is to that mountain I would attribute this extravagance, despite the insistence of some authorities that all this spasmodism is purely Spanish in origin; and though Naples was in the hands of the Spaniard when, in 1489-92, the terra-cotta group of Christ in the Sepulchre was executed for the church of Sant' Anna dei Lombardi, it was Guido Mazzoni, an

Italian, who was responsible for it. A group of fifteenth-century worthies poses about the body of Christ, in attitudes, and with expressions, of such frantic realism that Tussaud is mere conventional decoration in comparison with them. The wart, for instance, on the cheek of Nicodemus—or was it Joseph of Arimathea? How different in intention it was from the wart in Pinturicchio's picture, the painter's transfigured into a sort of radiance, the sculptor's meticulous with a mean virtuosity! But looking upon the Mary Magdalene hideously weeping, her flung hair, her jaw obscenely twisted, I wondered why the face was so irresistibly familiar. Then I remembered. In no detail of pose or feature was she different from a woman I had seen in a back street on my way to Sant' Anna—her own great-grandchild's great-grandchild, perhaps. Why not? Loftier families have sunken to lowlier gutters. The woman was calling now upon all the saints, now upon her neighbours, to witness the iniquity of the woman in the doorway opposite. So, in fact, was the woman in the doorway opposite. The neighbours grouped about them, not unlike the grouping of the figures in the Sepulchre, gave each complainant their impartial sympathy; but this impelled the last recess of lung on the part of both ladies to more and more brazen clamour. Till the husband of the Magdalene slapped her heavily on the mouth and dragged her by the hair through the dark portals behind them. Once more she issued and presented her views to the Chorus, but with more equanimity: with a tolerance, even, of the arch-fiend opposite. The arch-fiend was beating her head monotonously on a wall.

I wonder if the theatre proper is so dowdy in Naples because its impulse is already so bounteously gratified anywhere in the city from the gutter to the cathedral? They go in for the Bernhardt method, of course, as opposed to the Duse; but could Sarah herself, impersonating Hecuba or Niobe, have improved upon, or approached even, the skill of either of these two ladies? At its most reverent and magnificent, the histrionic art finds itself fitly housed in the churches, most of which are baroquized into as close a semblance as possible of a Metropolitan Opera House. What could have been more nobly stage-managed than the service next day in the cathedral? I do not know what saint they celebrated, but he was important enough to evoke the bishop from his chair. Multitudes of priests and novices enfiladed down the nave and under the Gothic vaulting of the aisles, each holding before him a tall candle. There were two novices, strayed from I know not what land, whose hair was honey-pale; the tonsure lay in it like a silver penny. The candle shining back upon them made their faces translucent as alabaster. You almost felt even so soon an aureole might gather about them. The priests were chanting in plain-song from ancient tomes of vellum bound in red leather, their own faces seeming but another page out of the tomes they were carrying. And at the centre of them burned the pride of the mitred bishop, splendid down to his brocaded shoes.

That evening in the *Teatro Nuovo* I could not help wondering how these actors could induce themselves to act and the audience to watch them, when so much more hallowed a stage-play, wrought with such artistry, was

performed (if you exclude viewless witnesses) for the joy of a dozen wrinkled beggars and three tourists, any morning in any church. The title of the play was Vienna, I presume, *via* Paris : *L'Amore chi ffa ffa !* Poor thing, must it ? But take this as a typical week's entertainment in the boulevards :

ANTOINE. *Le Couché de la Mariée.*
L'ABRI. *Le Nu aux Nues.*
CONC. MAYOL. *Oh ! quel Nu !*
CIGALE. *Oh ! Shocking !*
AMBASSAD. *Paris sans Voiles.*

In Paris at least it is all done (and in Vienna was once done) with considerable featness. Now the actors at the *Teatro Nuovo* were supposed to be not only the naughtiest members of the Neapolitan *beau monde*, but its most exquisitely behaved ; more particularly the actor-manager, Signor Gennaro di Napoli. But all the gentlemen retained their hats throughout the indoor sets ; nor did they on one occasion doff them when a lady appeared. Perhaps, said I, they have glued their hats on because they are suffering from a distressing malady of the scalp. Yet when the ladies picked their teeth on the stage as they maintained a cultured persiflage with their lovers over a wing of chicken, I could not impugn the soundness of their teeth. The climax was still to come. The back cloth displayed the curve of the Bay of Naples, and Signor Gennaro di Napoli was deep in honeyed converse with the *ingénue*. Then he scraped his throat, collected saliva from every recess of it, and spat all the way from Naples to Castellamare. The lady did not blink an eyelash. Nor did Signor Gennaro di Napoli.

Nor the audience. Nobody blinked an eyelash save I, and I blinked many.

'Hold,' said I, retiring hurriedly; 'here is time to protest. There was a priest during the service this afternoon' (I have tried to keep this dark), 'and just as the procession had achieved the circuit of the cathedral for the last time, and the bishop was about to ascend into the sanctuary—the priest spat sombrely before him, into the path of the bishop, the bishop's brocaded shoes. Now this was a priest. His concern is with the good manners not of this world but of the next. He has another technique. But when the actor-manager of a polite comedy spits all the way from Naples to Castellamare, here, as I have said before, is time to protest.'

I tried to drown my grievance in a glass of *coccus*, which I presume to be a distillation from the milk of coco-nut, but I disliked it exceedingly.

V

In that grim cellar which is the theatre at Herculaneum, the memory of the *Teatro Nuovo* abode with me tenaciously; I could not quite decide why. So, for that matter, did the Empire in Leicester Square, and the Empire in Rochdale, and the Tivoli in Manchester (now a cinema, they tell me, alas! alas!). Deep under layers of ashes and lava, you draw breath in clammy air, where seats and galleries thrust into solid blackness. High overhead stares down a disc of remembering sky. But of all that strangeness, nothing so thrilled me as a spider crawling—for what sustenance?—among the yellow stalactites that drip out of the tufa. Pipistrelles inhabit

here, spiders are their food. But spiders, I ask, what seek they? Do they now these thousand years wait for those flies round whom lava froze in a cynic simulation of amber? In the garden of the House of the Papyri I plucked rosemary and apple-blossom, and placed them between the leaves of William Blake, my mind still haunted by Signor Gennaro di Napoli, and dim shades wandered from the Tivoli in Manchester. 'Just as one plucks a leaf or flower and drops it between the pages of a book he is reading to remind him on some future occasion, when by chance he finds it again on opening the book at some future time, of the scene, the place, the very mood of the moment' . . . so wrote W. H. Hudson. I have opened Blake since; and it is not the blue bay that reverts to me, nor the squalid slums that sprawl over the deep entombment of Herculaneum, nor Herculaneum itself . . . but jokes that gibber across music-halls like churchyard cats, and Signor Gennaro spitting all the way from Naples to Leicester Square.

Is it, perhaps, this: that sitting in these other theatres, I have found myself buried profoundly under layers of humour that once too was molten even as the lava was that engulfs the theatre of Herculaneum?—a humour that now is cold and congealed as that same lava, or bacon in Labrador? The problem still eludes me.

Pompeii? There might have been more loving-kindness in me regarding Pompeii, if not for that accomplished guide who assumed me as a cloud assumes a mountain-top, no more forcefully, not a whit less unescapably. At the very frontier of Italy I had forewarned myself of the uselessness and chicanery of the

guides at Pompeii. From stage to stage I had repeated a formula regarding them, bidding my soul beware. I had envisioned each of their gambits and thought out a counter-move. Descending from my station on the Circum-Vesuvian railway, I felt myself armed cap-à-pie. Foolish Michele, more foolish Francesco, rushing towards me with gesture and vociferation, as if that moment I had descended from the Pullman out of Cincinnatti! I uttered three words and they crumbled. Nose in air, I pursued my path towards the ruins. Giuseppe was rather suave, Benito rather scholarly . . . quite. I knew all about it. This guide spoke of his own starving mother and that of my personal graces. One addressed me as 'Milord,' his friend as 'Commendatore.' I smiled darkly. 'Ah!' I said vaingloriously. No more than that.

But the accomplished Ferdinando said no word and made no advances. He did not dog my footsteps as Carlo did, and Roberto. I can say no more concerning him than that he was latent. But when the sensation of pathetic weakness came, which comes for one moment (but one moment only) to every visitor of Pompeii, and my head swam, and my eyes blurred—gently, modestly, Ferdinando was at my side. One half-moment more and I would have recovered. My formula would have been on my lips again. But Ferdinando was too accomplished for that. He had achieved me. I was lost.

Grievous sums had been mentioned to me as passing from guided to guide upon these occasions; but nothing to compare with the capital levy I found myself subject to. There had been an occasion in Padua upon which

I had lost my self-respect, when the hook-nosed youth swaggered over from my pocket to the National Lottery stall. But the self-hatred that burned in me in Pompeii and the names that I called myself, quite loudly, I had best not speak of. I made a further discovery, partly through the salacious winks diverted towards Ferdinando by the guides and custodians, partly because Ferdinando took a large swig of cognac amongst the tombs and became amiable. He had enough property to live on, I gathered, a mile or two away ; his uncle had left him some vineyards and olive-groves, just enough to provide a man with food, clothing, and a bed. But it was just because a man can't always endure the last in single strictness . . . he expatiated on the theme . . . that he found it necessary to supplement his uncle's vineyards with his present occupation. I assured him that his information made our present relations all the more gratifying. He took another swig of cognac. 'Do you know,' he said, 'if I go up to a girl in Naples and talk to her in Neapolitan, she 's got the cheek to ask me . . .'

'Infamous !' said I. 'And these new excavations ? I 've been to the Director at the Museum . . .'

He was still fuming with indignation. 'Got the cheek to ask me . . .'

And then I bade him be silent, and looked at him through narrowed lids, long and contemplatively.

'You are Pompeii !' I said slowly, but not for his delectation.

'No !' he remonstrated, 'I was born in . . .'

'Pompeii ! You are the very spirit of the vice of

Pompeii walking the earth again. That heartless, acute, persistent sensuality which distinguished your city from the other vicious cities of the world—the lubberly complacency of Brussels, the effete intellectualism of Paris, the ferocious swagger of Budapest, the furtive anxiety of London—you are a greater thing than you know. This city was you in each sex and in all its classes. Yours were the dark eyes that looked out from each *lupanar*, and yours the dark eyes that responded. Looking upon you, I revise my conclusions regarding the activities of Messrs. Cook and the American Express Company. Earthquake was not enough to expunge you. Vesuvius wrought mightily. But you are not yet expunged. Beware!' I said. 'Yet what will it serve you if you watch night or day? Nature having worked monstrously and failed, she will work infinitesimally and succeed. All the microscopes at Padua and Bologna will seek to isolate the virus of the new inexpugnable disease. The tumbrils will roll from door to door, demanding . . .'

'Demanding,' he said, 'seventy-five liras. But I say to her, I say, "Do you take me for an Englishman? Thirty liras," I say, "and that 's twenty more than you got last night! . . ."'

'O God!' I cried, shaking my fist towards Vesuvius, 'you miserable, snivelling, ineffective puppy of a volcano!'

CAPRI

I

IT will take much argument to convince me that the seagull which wheeled over our heads as the steamer snorted towards Capri was not the seagull which had impelled me to verses upon the Lake of Garda. I have already spoken of her. Nor will I believe that she was not the same fowl—I leaning over the Thames Embankment—that hung whitely against the sooted sun ; and if she was not the same gull that entranced me as I lay in a chalk cleft that looks down on Alum Bay in the Isle of Wight, what gull was she then ? For indeed even then I was approaching the conclusion that if she was a seagull half her time she was my familiar all her time, my particular spirit ; and I know now that when I attempt the midmost swamps of Africa, beyond the reach of any seagull's wings, she will assume a shape of flamingo or hornbill or whatever creature will be appropriate to that region. She put me in mind of these places so vividly—Embankment, Isle of Wight, the yellow coast by Seascale that looks towards the gap of Wastwater, and your feet ache for the boulders on Scafell and your body to be plunged into Grisdale Tarn on the slope of Helvellyn—that I became suddenly and overpoweringly homesick. The panorama of the Sorrentine peninsula became cardboard ; and if I felt, as we approached Capri, that I must bid the steward bind me to the mast, it was not because I feared the sirens' singing, but because of the danger that I might disembark at Sorrento and stumble blindly towards Chiasso, Paris, and home. How

long the impulse might have lasted is another matter. So that even the shape of Monte Solaro which hangs over Anacapri (as kingly of contour as any mountain in the world though it tell no arrogant tale of metres) did not hearten me; nor the colour and stridency of the Grande Marina. So thoroughly in spirit was I in England when I jumped on to the breakwater from the skiff, that when the women crowded about me to lift my luggage upon their padded heads, I blushed with shame. 'A woman demean herself and me by carrying my luggage? Never! *Avanti!*' I staggered towards the funicular railway that jerks you up to the township of Capri.

While the English, Danish, and American ladies busied themselves with the long-leafed foliage of artichoke that bordered the ascending terraces of vine, orange, and lemon (certain ladies declaring that the artichoke was young fig-trees and others mangold-wurzels, and not a few that it was juniper, alternatively known as myrtle), my mind went back to that English clergyman in Venice, who had invited me to afternoon tea under the flare and smoulder of St. Mark's mosaics. From him I had learned that the father and mother of my dear friend Divvetts (I need not say that all the Divvetts's of my narrative are elsewhere known by other names) resided in the Hotel Splendide. Well I recollected what friends Divvetts and I had been; how often we had partaken of fried plaice at breakfast each with the other in our respective colleges; and how we had walked to Dorchester and he knelt towards the Christian bells and I towards the pagan sun, and turned again and met and vowed deathless friendship. 'I shall rid myself of my

homesickness,' I said, issuing from the funicular and finding myself besieged by a multitude of small boys with hotel caps, each declaring that the world knew no place lordlier than his own hotel, yet so crowded with home comforts, not to mention English toast for breakfast. 'I shall rid myself of this nostalgia for my homeland,' I said, 'sitting on a stool at the feet of Mrs. Divvetts or playing dominoes with Mr. Divvetts; or when not engaged upon these occupations, eating English toast for breakfast. I shall tell Mrs. Divvetts how Theophilus and I were elected to the Union on the same day and encouraged each other to make our maiden speeches, and what a funny trick Theophilus had of saying, "Yes, papa!" to his tutor. We shall be so domestic that I will let her bend down to stroke my hair. Only if she will propose vinegar bandages when I have headaches, will I raise a firm but gentle admonition.'

We had attained the Hotel Splendide.

'May I,' I said, 'present myself to Signora Divvetts?' (Could the *facchino* possibly miss the heartbreak in my voice?)

I was led to the *salone* of the Signora Divvetts. I knocked. A tight-pursed elderly little English lady, oh so English, appeared.

'We do not want any, thank you!' she said severely in Italian. I sniggered. I stammered. 'Your son, Theophilus . . .' She looked at me suspiciously. I then told her of my friendship with Theophilus, and of how he had often told me of his home people in Kettering. Surely he must have mentioned my name?

'Oh, I see. You say you are a friend of my son!'

she concluded grimly, in a voice which indicated her profound disbelief.

But how intimate a friend. The Union, both elected on the same day. . . . She became more and more icy the more circumstantial evidence I offered her. What should I have had to gain from masquerading as a friend of Theophilus? The Tichborne case . . . that was it, of course . . . the good lady had been reading the Tichborne case. But I wasn't pretending to be her *son*. Only her son's friend. And as far as that went, I *had* been the friend of Theophilus. No, she did not seem at all likely to propose vinegar bandages. My heart rocked desolately.

At this moment her husband appeared. Mr. Divvetts was evidently an artist. There are many artists in Capri. They paint the group of rocks called the Faraglioni. Sometimes they paint the Faraglioni with a hole. Sometimes without a hole. They always paint the Faraglioni.

'Coysh,' said Mrs. Divvetts. 'This gentleman says he was a friend of Theophilus at Oxford.'

'We were elected to the Union on the same day,' I insisted.

'Follow Mr. Divvetts,' requested Mrs. Divvetts. I followed Mr. Divvetts. We entered a sitting-room.

Mr. Divvetts took a copy of the *Observer* out of his Norfolk jacket. From his breast-pocket he produced a miniature chess-set. 'So you were a friend of Theophilus at Oxford?' said he.

'We were elected to the Union on the same day,' I replied.

He adjusted his glasses. He got to work on the first

chess problem. He manipulated pawns and rooks and things. He manipulated them for an hour and a quarter.

'We went for a walk to Dorchester together. We had boiled eggs at Culham.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Divvetts. He manipulated more rooks. 'Oh!' he said. He had solved the first problem. He got to work on the second problem. Another hour passed.

'. . . At Oxford together,' I quavered.

There was no sound. He committed violence upon a bishop.

Another half-hour passed. The door squeaked as I opened it, desolately, fearfully. I crept along the passage on tip-toe and came face to face with the porter.

'My luggage,' I gasped, 'take it away. Anywhere. Quick!'

'*Signore*, why . . .'

'I am not quite so homesick as I was. This nostalgia for my native land—I have got the better of it. Where is my walking-stick?'

I rose from dinner that evening, in the pleasant hotel called Manfredi Pagano—a venerable name in the touristical history of the island—having so far overcome my homesickness that I could have contemplated without dismay perpetual exile in Madagascar. It was not the fault of the maiden ladies from Tunbridge and St. Albans, because I had expected them, and there they were. They are merely a barometer of the currencies, and 'Economy with Honour' is their slogan. As soon as the French currency began to sink towards the level of the Italian, they proceeded to transport their pale faces and the works

of Robert Hichens across the Alps, and when the *valuta* of Spitzbergen is more advantageous to them than France, thither will their nipped faces repair that even now suggest they have sojourned long in that land. So do their mittens. But most clearly of all the ecstasy with which they wallow in the torrid sands that encompass the Garden of Allah. 'Economy with Honour'—for they look out timidly upon the world, as if fearing lest some dark-blooded alien might any moment havoc them into those rash regions ; not only fearing, perhaps, but hoping a little, ever such a little. But the dark-blooded alien curbs his passion, and they revert to the kronen of Hungary, how they dropped five thousand to the pound yesterday. To see these maiden ladies attack the glissade of their spaghetti roused in me no emotion ; it was all reserved for the blue-jowled Scotsman opposite me. His chin was stark and he took small sips of brandy between the dishes.

'To think he would have the impudence,' he was saying to the woolly lady at the next table, 'to say good-morning to me !'

'Whom may you be speaking of ?' she replied, with an intonation from California, I thought. Even so soon I was struck by a certain quality in the lilt of the syllables which I can define as only . . . definitely, as only a sort of cosmic benignity, the accent of the forces of Ruag that were shortly to occupy my attention.

The Scotsman could hardly bring himself to mention the creature. 'The barber !' he choked. 'That fellow Pasqualino ! A common barber !'

'And he dared to say good-morning to you ?' inquired

the Ruag lady, but with no subtone of irony. She was cosmically identifying herself with the point of view of Kilmarnock.

'I had the greatest pleasure in the world in walking straight past him without moving an eyelash. And what is more. He knows it 's my time for a haircut, and he 'll be expecting me to come in one of these mornings. But he 's not going to make anything out of *me*.'

'Are you going to do it yourself?' asked the lady—for 'Do it yourself' is one of the injunctions of Ruag.

'I 'll take the early boat to Naples, and get it done there, and return the same afternoon!' exclaimed the Scotsman triumphantly.

It struck me that Pasqualino would have the better of *that* encounter.

'A Socialist! I shouldn't be in the least surprised if he was a Bolshevist too!'

I suspected the remark to be addressed to me.

'How interesting!'

'Bolshevism is the ruin of Europe!'

'A regrettable movement!'

'And all these writing-people in England bound hand and foot to Trotsky! They ought all to be shot!'

'All the writing-people in England? Gentle Mr. Galsworthy, for instance? Miss Dell?'

'Galsworthy! Galsworthy!' he shouted, brandishing his fork. 'Not shot! Crucified, thrown to the Russians and crucified! Galsworthy—pah!—Shaw, Wills or Wells or whatever the fellow calls himself! Throw them all to the Russians and crucify them!'

'Hardy?'

'*Loves of the dairymaids!*' he sneered. 'Not an ounce of imagination!'

'And whom do you suggest,' I asked calmly, wondering whether or not to throw my wine-bottle at him, 'as a writer of real imagination? Something a little more exalted than dairymaids?'

He paused. 'Robert Hichens!' he said (for he was but another maiden lady like the rest). '*There's* a writer! *There's* imagination if you like! As for the others—bound hand and foot to Trotsky! Throw them to the Russians and crucify them! That's the only thing to do with them!'

There was a surprising interruption from a stiff lady a few tables away. She wore a black bodice and was reading Jeremy Taylor.

'I'm perfectly certain,' she rapped out, 'Mr. Galsworthy on the cross would see the best of both sides!'

There was something Olympian in the finality of her remark. She was never heard to make another.

'As for that barber . . .' the Scotsman began blusteringly. But the lady in the black bodice rose from the table. The rest of us followed.

'Me,' I said colloquially, 'for Madagascar!'

II

Perhaps you do not know what is the meaning of Ruag? Not even of the Fellowship of Udar? Have you never bathed in the Fountains of Lucidity? Never? Miserable mortal! Never received a message from Robert Browning, not even Sister Roberta? You ought to do

something about it. It is true that Ruag and I had never met before my residence at the Hotel Manfredi Pagano in Capri. But Miss Woolworth assured me I have always, if but unconsciously, had my foot on the first rung of the ladder of Udar. (Or was it the ladder of Ruag?) Oh, it was good to learn from Miss Woolworth that cosmos and I were interchangeable terms. Even if it meant that the gentleman from Kilmarnock and I were also co-terminous and co-udarous, what mattered even that? Couldn't I localize him in one of the further nebulae? That very night I learned something of the ways of Udar. I had seen Miss Woolworth disappear into the next bedroom to my own and heard her moving a piece of furniture along the carpet (an arm-chair to a table, I rightly surmised). As I undressed, I heard a first shuffling of paper, as one hears the first noises of a tidal wave which is at length to convert the landscape into one seethe of waters, even as Miss Woolworth was to convert her bedroom into a turbid spate of paper engulfing all but the top of her dressing-table and the peaks of her bed; even these at times to be engulfed in that frothy sea. For Miss Woolworth is on intimate terms with nobler beings than those who carnally partake of macaroni with her in the dining-room below. She needs but place herself in her arm-chair, fumble in her blouse for a pencil and apply it to the paper on her lap. Immediately the air is tempestuous with presences that snatch at the pencil to expound for the benefit of Miss Woolworth and humanity at large the principles of Udar. It is usually Robert Browning that prevails, though William James gives him

a good run for his money. Miss Woolworth looks up wistfully, though her hand is being impelled at demon speed.

'Robert 's in a tearing temper to-day, isn't he?'

Sometimes he uses a whole sheet of paper for four or five words. Now and again his passion for revelation surges up so desperately in him that the pencil rips its way through the top sheet of paper and spoils several sheets below.

'Robert, Robert!' whispers Miss Woolworth reprovingly.

Robert can stand being reprimanded when only Miss Woolworth is about, but my presence puts him out altogether. A rival poet, too.

Suddenly the demon pencil slackens in its speed, and slowly, sulkily, it circles round upon itself.

'Robert, aren't you going to be good to-day?'

Out of sheer spite he dictates a few entirely unrelated words, rather like a poem by Miss Gertrude Stein in the volume called *Tender Buttons*. Then the sulky circle begins again.

'Robert, I 'm ashamed of you,' sighs Miss Woolworth, like a nurse to a naughty child. 'You may go back to Udar!'

He goes. The pencil droops out of the perpendicular for one moment only, if at all.

'Who are you?'

'Percy B. Shelley!'

My scalp stiffens. When the mere printed word of him has always made my blood sing as the sap sings in trees, what now when the wings of his very spirit fan

my brow ? Definitely the writing has changed in speed, inclination, size, everything but substance. We still bathe in Fountains of Lucidity which my poor uninitiate brain finds more complex than the binomial theorem.

'Will you repeat that again, Percy ? '

Percy submits to authority rather more meekly than he used to on earth. He repeats it again and again. Twenty and thirty pages of it. Forty pages of it.

Miss Woolworth breaks the silence. 'Sister Roberta 's talking now ! '

'Sister Roberta ? '

'That 's what they call Mrs. Browning in Ruag.'

I examine the writing again. It certainly has changed from Shelley's, it is more deliberate and feminine. It proceeds with feminine deliberation for three-quarters of an hour, like *Aurora Leigh.*

My somnolent wits are smitten into attention again. A great rip of paper. Sheet after sheet flung to the carpet. The sea rises above our ankles, sprays upward towards our knees.

'Robert ! ' cries Miss Woolworth, startled, pleased. She has a soft spot in her heart for Robert.

Robert has got over his petty dislike for me. He has discovered that I am engaged on a novel, and dictates a message of good cheer to me from the rims of the Fountains of Lucidity. Yet that is not all. William James is not to be outdone in this udarous encouragement of a younger generation ; and two days later, he also hails me brightly from out of the supernal brightness of Ruag.

I creep gently out of Miss Woolworth's room and retire to my own, leaving her with her ghostly visitants.

If Sister Roberta has been more garrulous than usual, Miss Woolworth will still be in her arm-chair next morning, the spume and windrift of this tragical eloquence blowing against her ears. Fatigue will sag the corners of her mouth ; there will be disorder in her greying hair and pouches below her eyes. But in her eyes, what lights shining, reflecting the beacons of lands how far !

And I will say to myself, trying to put her out of mind—what perversity is this in me that has a fondness for discovering natural places attired in garments antithetic to their renowned quality. Thus the evil coil of the smoke of Vesuvius—a funeral banner for spent slaughter and a Sibylline prognostication of intended dooms—is wrapped about the volcano's head until it is no more than some such innocent halo as might crown Bredon or Skiddaw. Or Capri, island of tranced waters and feathery plumes of air, is in the throes of a big wind wherein the sea is choppy as the Channel and the trees groan at their roots like the thorns of some Scottish heath. How are the oaks havocked that so long retained their gold guerdon of leaves. Nor will the chilled anemones open their eyes to-day.

But Robert is at the wrist of Miss Woolworth, petulant, inexorable.

Fräulein Steinach breaks in upon the thought of her. Miserable, pallid, demoralized little Fräulein out of Munich, will you ever not wear a squat straw hat ? Will he, your lover, ever answer your Alexandrian library of epistles ? Does he exist at all ? Even as all day and most of the night Miss Woolworth is engaged upon calligraphic labours (if the tarantella manias of

Robert may be deemed calligraphy), so is Fräulein Steinach, and there is no question of the calligraphy at all. How laboriously she rules her paper and then, tongue tight between her teeth, she conducts her copper-plate correspondence. She has never been known to receive a letter, but that makes her own next letter the more imperative. There is no stroke which she does not execute with the pious care of a monk at his missal. How her starved little heart exults with the curves, paces sombrely with the straight lines. And if the penultimate word of her page be written awry, once more, inexorable as Robert himself, the letter begins again. Miss Woolworth pays for her own paper, and there are no postage-stamps between her country and the country with which she corresponds. But the Fräulein must needs ask: 'If you could lend me a few sheets of paper and some envelopes. . . . I am expecting some from Munich.' You hasten to supply her, but on the sixth or seventh request not so hastily.

'If you could just lend me a few postage-stamps?' . . .

And whether it is at the luncheon-table or at the long narrow tables tacked down with American cloth at the Café Morgano, or seated amid wild thyme and below her the dancing waters, there is no moment at which the Fräulein is not engaged upon her copper-plate calligraphics, humourless, unremitting, German.

Whether the correspondents of Miss Woolworth or Fräulein Steinach are the more real, who shall decide till world's end? Come, a kestrel strayed from the craggy wildernesses of Solaro is hovering against the ilex and the sun is tawny-red upon his wings, the identical

tawny-red of lentisk leaves at the turn of the year. The island of Ischia, Circe's island, might be a beaker of amethyst wines lifted to the lips of Odysseus. Prithee, Robert, at least during the dusk that now is falling upon us, cease thy importunities. And he that shall climb the road from Capri to Anacapri looking behind him at the town he has left, shall see a great cross of lights fallen upon the island, where the road winds between the ebony groves. The arms of the cross stretch prostrate on either side of the Isthmus of the Two Gulfs towards Jove's villa and the Madonna of the Grotto. And passing under the Madonna's feet and the lamp that shines inward upon her, uncover yourself also as the peasants do, for it is no mean kindness that sets you here on the hushed mountain and looking out towards the enormous burning bow of Naples Bay. Capri is her arrow singing night and day as if she still were speeding arrow-wise over the watery gulf. How will the bowstring of your own taut mind, in moments of beauty, not launch her own arrows also? Moments of beauty . . . moments of beauty . . . pity the points of your arrows that they are so blunt and the flight of them that they are so crooked. Soon brought to earth, but to an earth which is by day a crystal and by night a dark diamond. In this wise sang I, climbing to Anacapri under climbing woodlands of ilex and arbutus.

Moments of beauty—so unexpected, radiant
As the barbed fires of a bird a deep darkness
Suddenly launches into broad blue day:
How to celebrate them, with what ceremonial?
To utter a cry of the soul's jubilation,
Or to fall down on dumb grass and pray?

Mortal, immortal? Do they merge utterly
Into blank time before and behind them
As a last gold wave in the levelled grey?
Or do they bide their hour of resurrection,
Securer than armies, bronze hoof and iron cannon,
As a fallen seed bides in the profound clay?

What need you trouble with vain inquirings
The surly gods or your own ignorant spirit?
Yours to await the wild moments. They
From that deep darkness sometimes leap fearfully
Like a slim antelope with twitching nostrils.
Spring, tiger, pitiless upon your prey!

Sometimes—be wary!—there is equal combat,
Fang against fang in the forest clearing.
The thick trees murmur 'Be slain or slay!'
Yea but the last, the last of moments,
Shall a tall fire kindle from deep darkness
And you sucked flamewards like a wisp of hay!

III

Your Miss Woolworths and your gentlemen from Kilmarnock are your first stratum of Capri consciousness. But your 'South Wind' Capri? Your eagle's nest clamorous with cosmopolitan sins? Your hotbed of Tiberian orgies? Hearken at the pronouncement of the Kilmarnock cynic: 'This stinking little island!' It is hard, it is very hard, *not* to throw that wine-bottle at his head. Yet perhaps—odious suspicion—the accounts of a Norman Douglas are no more and no less fictional than his, or the malevolent inventions of Tacitus?

The two newly-arrived ladies at the Manfredi Pagano are perturbed and disappointed. Perhaps they too went through the process of horror and disillusion that I experienced that morning, to see a sinister procession defiling through the narrow streets of Anacapri. How mysterious they looked, those young men, clad in a large white smock, a pale blue cape meeting over the chest, and surmounting all a hood with slots for eyes, a hood that writhed into a point like a snake's tail. Here, in wizard Capri, some primeval prototype of the Ku Klux Klan, converting their vicious futility into efficient peril? Camorra itself, perhaps, here so arrogant that it does not hesitate to proclaim itself at noon? And then certain unhooded approached, very sweet and very dirty little Capriote children, no more. And their captain also removed his hood, and he was such a peasant as you see in any vineyard now, pruning his vines. And they are the *Fratelli Immacolati*, a bystander tells me (save for their garments, which upon closer examination are very maculate indeed). Yet how shall males be organized to perpetuate an immaculate conception? Another heresy? They walk somewhat aimlessly three times between two given points, carrying before them a sainted staff. But their function is no more than to provide each other with medicine when they are sick, or, when they are dead, such music as I heard yesterday, preceding a coffin down the rocky road to the cemetery. Rechabites are they, and Buffaloes, not the emissaries of some morphinomaniac prince scouring the island for a guileless new minister to his jaded lust.

Perhaps the two new ladies had been chagrined that

morning even as I. Perhaps they had not forgiven the island for failing to despatch some eccentric nobleman to meet them, attired whimsically in a silk hat and a loin-cloth of coral. But you could not fail to give ear to them when they exclaimed at the interval between risotto and cutlets :

'Letty dear, did you ever see a place so suburban as Capri? Clapham Common, *I* call it, oh so very common Clapham!'

And Letty replied, in the unmistakable accent of Balham, 'But so very *very* Clapham Common, my dear, don't you think so?' For is it not the inalienable privilege of Balham to acclaim Clapham suburban and of Clapham to shrug its shoulders at the suburbanity of Balham?

Oh that mine were the pen competent to deal with the transformation of Pearl Ponsonby (Mrs.)—for that was the name of Letty's sister as entered in the hotel register—into Lady Ponsonby; and how for a brief season she queened it in Capri :

'It wasn't my *husband* who made me a lady, my dear. *Born* a lady, you bet I was!'

For the next stratum of your Capri consciousness is the island's *naïveté*. I doubt not that if the more ardent admirers of Mr. Compton Mackenzie had represented him during his sojourn upon the island as the peer and supersessor of Shakespeare and Balzac, there would have been a heavy slump in the local value of the Elizabethan and the Frenchman. And if Lady Ponsonby had but represented herself as the Viscountess Wadethorpe, her ladyship's tenure of office would have endured at least

another season. One stage deeper than your pensionnaire is your villa-hierarch, American by birth mainly and Caprese by conviction. The villa-hierarchy begins by wintering upon the island and spending the summer in more strenuous latitudes. But lotus-season follows lotus-season more and more ravishingly and the spell of Capri falls upon them. And so naïve is the villa-hierarchy that no lady may get drunk but that the hierarchs know how many glasses produced that result and who provided them. And if, in the pensions, you were beginning to suspect the veracity of Tacitus, in the villas you do not hesitate to declare him a liar outright. How shall a Tiberius project his minions from the lip of the precipice, when you cannot trip upon your shoelace without subjecting the performance to continuous philosophic scrutiny?

A stage deeper. Who is this Swedish neurologist whom all the queens of Europe pursue? Ah, ah! Who is this that dares translate the sonnets of de Heredia? And, gracious heaven, is there not a lady at the Piccola Marina who brews absinthe for you at five o'clock, her gold tresses dissolute upon her shoulders? You are privileged to make their acquaintance. Charm, discretion, scholarship, a soupçon of eccentricity even . . . but alas, they have no available precipices. Youth does not swim naked in their marble tanks. Not for them does Lady Ponsonby queen it in the villas. They have known more dethronements than Bolivia, and they turn wearily from them and read the *Times*.

Had Tacitus any acquaintance with the head-dresses worn by the horses that gallop the *carrozze* up the mountain road and hurtle them down again? Did that

provoke the immortal calumny? They are certainly the most orgiastic feature of the island. It is not enough for flags to flutter from their equine brows and pale blue and pink ribbons to decorate their blinkers. Nor are they content with peacock feathers and the feathers of African pheasants. You will see complete ostriches bobbing outrageously on their heads as they advance like a palm-tree in convulsions. Never was Gaby Deslys so bedizened. The suggestion is rather of some frantic *danseuse de ventre* in the most abandoned cabaret of Buenos Ayres. I presume it is the stolid patience of their eyes contrasted with the spineless dancing of the feathers, the howling dyes they have been steeped in, which produces this effect of licentiousness, just as a provincial grocer letting himself rip in a night-club looks infinitely more dissipated than its deft habitués. Never had these thoughts presented themselves so vividly to me as upon one starless night when a friend and I descended towards Capri. Quite suddenly a *carrozza* plunged out of the darkness. The driver himself seemed hewn from black granite. The lamps, shining away from the occupant, made him quite problematic, if he existed at all. Only the horse's feathery tire reeled in a small cell of light. Blood-red the feathers seemed, rabid . . . as if cannibal swamps and gilded ball-rooms had contributed their utmost experience of depravity. The sensation seized me suddenly, overpoweringly.

'The Scarlet Woman!' I cried aloud. 'The Whore of Babylon!'

The carriage at that moment curved round under the rays of a lamp. It illumined the features of Mr.

Divvetts, none other than Mr. Divvetts. Did I expect to find his face convulsed with such indignation as you might expect in any mild artist who resolves chess problems in the *Observer* every Sunday and is suddenly described as a Scarlet Woman, a Whore out of Babylon? There was nothing in his face but a stupor of wild, wild fear. He was found out. The knuckles clasped about his stick were ivory white.

'Poor, poor Mrs. Divvetts!' I murmured, shuddering with horror at that revelation. 'Miserable Mrs. Divvetts!'

'A stage deeper!' I said to myself with satisfaction, 'and only achieved by going back where I started. Things are not what they seem in the pensions. The French count they have told me of in the inaccessible house over the cliff (alas! he is since deceased) and his shepherd attendant from the Campagna—their main passion, I doubt not, is pen-painting. Does not the radiant Greek countess who lives by the Piccola Marina, she who led armies to doom and glory in Thessaly, does she not spend laborious days at her loom, weaving, weaving? Not with any *arrière-pensée* like Penelope, but to produce admirable cushion-covers and tea-cosies, doubtless, if ordered?'

So it is in the bosom of thirty liras a day, not two or three thousands sterling a year, that Tiberius survives immortal? Mr. Trollope, indeed, informs us of the granddaughter of an English clergyman from Barchester that 'the blood of Tiberius flows in her veins. She is the last of the Neros!' I wonder what relation Mr. Divvetts is to the Signora Vesey-Neroni?

IV

Not many days later a rumour was abroad in the island : ' Have you heard, my dear, that that Norman Douglas is back again in Capri ? '

' Impossible, my dear ! After writing that odious book ? '

' I really think that the *sindaco* and the commune ought to do something about it. So tiresome. You can't tell whether he 's not listening to us at this very moment and taking notes. We 'll have to be *so* careful, my dear ! '

' Just so, darling. I had quite enough of it when he put me into that other horrid book of his. I couldn't look at myself for days without blushing.'

' I think I told you before, my dear . . .'

' But *everybody* agrees it 's me, you know. After all, my hair *is* red, Flora dear, and yours isn't ! '

Flora—in a tone of rising asperity : ' Really, Celia, you have always been perfectly absurd about it. Of *course* your hair is red, my dear. It 's been red for quite a long time. But was it quite so red when the man was gathering copy for that beastly book of his ? '

' Really, Flora. To be insulted like this in my own villa . . .'

' There you are again, Celia, always misunderstanding me. Here am I trying to defend you from the charge of being the model for that disgusting creature in *South Wind* and you jump down my throat and say I 'm insulting you.'

Celia—with difficulty restraining her temper : ' And

who, might I ask, *is* the original of that disgusting creature, as you call her ? '

' It is unfortunately perfectly obvious ! '

' Yourself, I presume ? '

' Who else ? My husband threatened——'

' Pah ! '—snorting—' your *husband* ? '

' *Really*, Mrs. Briskett ! '

' It was very kind indeed of you to call, Mrs. Sims ! '

' Good-afternoon, Mrs. Briskett ! '

' Good-afternoon, Mrs. Sims ! '

Two or three hours later Mrs. Sims meets Mr. Rivers on the piazza. (Mr. Rivers it is who translates sonnets from de Heredia. It is well known that he and Mr. Douglas are well acquainted.)

Mrs. Sims : ' Is it true, dear Mr. Rivers ? '

Mr. Rivers, wearily : ' You mean that Mr. Douglas has arrived on the island. Mrs. Sims, I will not commit myself. Whereas on the one hand it——er, is quite possible . . . on the other hand . . .'

Mrs. Sims, very loudly, for the benefit of Mrs. Briskett and husband who are passing at that moment : ' After the cruel way in which he caricatured me in *South Wind* . . .'

Mr. Rivers : ' But I assure you, Mrs. Sims . . .'

Mrs. Sims, still loudly : ' I can't understand how he can have the effrontery to appear on the island.' (By this time Mrs. Briskett and husband are safely out of earshot ; Mrs. Sims bends down languishingly towards Mr. Rivers's ear. She taps one of his waistcoat buttons with the handle of her parasol) : ' *Dear* Mr. Rivers,

don't you think you could *possibly* bring him in to dinner to-night. Such a charming creature, I always think, don't you ? '

It was that very evening I received a summons to attend a funeral dinner at Concettina's restaurant. The people whose grief it is that Capri is not more like Cannes do their best to forget the disparity at the Hotel Quisisana over a bottle of champagne. But those choice spirits who contemplate the paradox of existence over a bottle of Ischian wine (duly labelled ' Capri ') do it in Concettina's little *Stube.* (Or they used to. Capri is no less fickle than Soho, and the choicer spirits have now transferred their debts to the Fafeluccia in the Corso. *Eheu fugaces !* Yet I am not certain that with the celebration of the funeral dinner of Tiberius and the renaissance of Norman Douglas Concettina had not attained the apogee of her glory ; and that henceforth there was not something of keen dramatic fitness in leaving Concettina alone with her memories keeping their fallen day about her—Concettina who is older than the rocks among which she sits, and who, like the vampire, . . . but it would be unkind to drive the parallel home too close.)

My summons was an autoscript from no lesser a being than Signor Edwin Cerio, till lately *sindaco* of the commune of Capri, than whom not Asshur-bani-pal nor Aurungzebe was so potent a sovereign, nor Solomon pronounced jests more oracular in tongues more diverse. Is it not at this moment rumoured concerning him that in the bowery seclusion of ' Rosaio,' his hill-top house, he is engaged upon giving immortality to those grotesques of

Capri that have danced across the bewildering stage of his island century beyond century ; and no man knows how far into the backward and abysm of time his own memory penetrates ? Under his Saracenic roof he sits pondering, and the vines entwine the pergolas, the roses jostle the vines, tall lilies bow into the setting sun. His mind strays among the porticoes of imperial villas or takes wing to the poops of advancing galleys manned by the Northmen out of Sicily. When the nineteenth-century Germans quaff their *Münchenerbräu* to the lean cat Hiddigeigei sloping along the Capri roofs, his spirit alights upon the rim of their tankards. And if Marinetti declaims the bombardment of Adrianopoli or Mr. Mackenzie rhymes impromptu on the theme of Mr. Lawrence :

D. H. Lawrence
Says he has been to Florence.
If he had been Compton Mackenzie
He 'd have called it Firenze. . . .

all this to him is but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. . . .

We had better betake ourselves from Pater to Concettina and the funeral dinner of Tiberius ? A worthy anxiety. If it needed a more aspiring pen than mine to trace the metamorphosis of Miss Ponsonby into Lady Ponsonby, how much the less competent am I to limn the portraits of the guests of that evening of whom Lady Ponsonby was one of the least remarkable ? And what of the ghosts that jostled at our elbows and snatched at

our wineglasses and might not ruffle those sunset lakes as even might a passing thread of gossamer? At the head of our table sat Cerio, at the foot Leslie K. Dalmatic, a drooping and pallid youth who, issuing from some Middle Western state (not without suasion), had become *plus Oxford qu' Oxford* and would duly have led his lobster by its silver chain over the piazza had not the gentleman from *Sinister Street* preceded him. In contrast with Cerio's thick grey pyjama-jacket, assumed by that potentate only on the most solemn occasions, Dalmatic wore his pale purple silk sweater, making a gracious half-moon below the clavicles. Dalmatic smiled. Here was a whole company, with few exceptions distinguished or entertaining, who for a whole evening were to place before him their offerings of frankincense and spikenard.

Fawcett, the scion of one of our noblest politico-county families, was there. He danced on tip-toe on the Capri terraces, and his youth had been bound up with thoroughbreds, fillies and the Grand National.

Mr. Macedon was there, who was building a country house. Nothing more imperial than its fireplace had been heard of since the time of the emperors.

There also was Mrs. Chislehurst Bailey. She wore a terra-cotta gown.

Marinetti—how could Marinetti not be there? It was not many evenings ago that, embarking upon a Capri skiff after a visit to Naples, I suddenly was aware that the skiff was disobeying every convention of gravitation. When the oarsmen pulled landward the skiff plunged out to sea. When they ceased rowing, the skiff turned upon its axis. The oarsmen would accept no tip and the crowd

upon the breakwater formed fours. No custom was not violated, and if I was not aware that for the time being the sun stood still, it was because I had been too busy observing the fish, how they flung themselves upon the land, and the dogs, how they assumed fins, and sailed out to sea. Setting foot on dry earth at length (and all the vendors of coral were offering it gratis) a noise came down from the mountain-sides, a mechanical parody of a voice, creaking and disjointed. It was the voice of the *ficchi d'India* acclaiming Marinetti, his six-inch collar and his bowler hat.

Marinetti was there and Signora Marinetti. Had you expected the lady to be the logical embodiment of Marinetti's futurism, a lady gaunt as a chimney and with a mouth like a railway embankment, a lady from whom the last vestige had been by nature and art eliminated of that demoralizing beauty associated with classical antiquity and the Old Masters—you would have been well within your rights but grievously disappointed. Helen standing within her brilliant window niche, the agate lamp within her hand, was such as she ; Juliet at her balcony was such as she ; Inez that went into the west to dazzle when the sun was down and rob the world of rest, was such as she. She was the prime futurist's own complete refutation.[1]

Gladys was there. She is a widow. She can only achieve nepenthe upon the lips of literary men whom she kisses with less passion than piety. Should a painting man or a music man present his cheeks to her, she will turn from him with stony eyes. Also there was Viola,

[1] *Indeed, yes. Indeed, yes. But has she not, since the penning of these lines, produced, under the name of* '*Benedetta*,' *a volume called* Le Forze Umane—Romanzo Astratto con Sintesi Grafiche ? *What shall be done about it?*

whose husband is the second handsomest man in Italy, and her ancestors conduced the American Revolutionary Wars.

Francis Brett Young was there, lending to the assembly a certain fine austerity which perhaps it had lacked else. The profane having said concerning his villa embosomed in the olive-groves of the high plateau of Anacapri, that it might be deemed the Tauchnitz Edition made flesh, such exalted gatherings take place there of the men of letters elected from two continents, he was there to prove how Monte Solaro on high occasions might bow its head, and hold genial converse with the Faraglioni. Jessie Brett Young was there, relaxed from the strain of lightning adjustments to her husband's kaleidoscopic backgrounds —Mendip, the Rand, Dulas Fechan, Kilimanjaro, North Bromwich, Connemara, Brixham, Trinacria—having unified them perhaps in the surge of all the world's flowers that sweeps against her hill-top terrace of Fraita.

These and others—would I had space and wit to speak of them—assisted at the funeral honours of the emperor. The emperor himself, a wreath about his brow, a black veil thrown about him, stood in effigy upon the table among the shrimps and prawns. At the right hand of Cerio, and *vis-à-vis* with Tiberius, sat Norman Douglas, the arch-novelist of Capri. I cannot doubt that some profound symbolism was intended by this juxtaposition. Do not the philosophers maintain that all new gods arise out of the foam the old gods have left behind them on the sea's surface as they sink into those unimaginable chambers which are the subconscious mind of our race? No saint in Italy but can be related with the pagan god that had preceded him upon his own altars. And did

Cerio intend aught else than to symbolize the birth of a new myth from the womb of an old that had died in labour? Tiberius is dead, poisoned by an overdose of whitewash. Applied externally in the usual manner, the stuff has burned like lime to his heart; must you people the vaulted rooms of the villa of Tiberius with appropriate ceremony, alas, you are too late in the day to conceive carousals beyond modern wit and vices exceeding modern ingenuity. Prayer-meetings, prithee, and spelling-bees. Fill their beakers neither with harsh wine from Etna nor the cool Falernian juices. What prototype the Latins knew of Horlick's Malted Milk, cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth (or mix hot, if desired, add salt to taste)—lift the beakers of Horlick's, I say, to those too grievously rehabilitated lips. Tiberius is dead. And yet, have you chosen well, Cerio? Let the local poet declare, if he will:

> *Was there a sin Tiberius committed*
> *Which would one moment find N. D. outwitted?*

If you were informed that Mr. Douglas's last engagement before he left England was the pulpit of the City Temple, you would find no difficulty in believing it. The fine hair is silver-grey, and the straight fringe falling over the temples bears a tinge of reddish gold. Eyes and mouth and chin conspire to emphasize this air of effortless sanctity. Let him add one glass of wine to another, a twenty-second to a twenty-third, and each glass is lifted to his lips more sacramentally than the last. Hearken to his speech. What learning, what charm, what gravity! Whether it be the fauna of Famagusta or the behaviour

of the Swahili, the co-operative system adopted in the sardine-factories of Bergen, or the autochthonic, as opposed to the imported, dialects of Tahiti, he is witty, discreet, illuminating. Goats and the eucalyptus he does not care for. The cheese of Catanzaro is his especial delight. Whereas the behaviour of the British School at Athens he finds not wholly beyond reproach, he remembers at the time of his diplomatic experience in St. Petersburg . . .

Enter Concettina !

Whether drawn by some spiritual impulse too profound to analyse, or whether the funeral dinner of Tiberius was organized less to do honour to the emperor, less for the mytho-poetic reasons heretofore explained, than to bring about the meeting of Douglas and Concettina, will never be accurately known. Certain it is that since the departure of the novelist from the island many seasons ago, Concettina has vowed loudly and frequently to pluck every hair from the beard Mr. Douglas has never worn. Certain it is that the unpaid bill left by him for crates of wine consumed and oxen devoured, recited like a litany by Concettina upon certain mornings of the month, reads rather like the day-book of an invading army than the appetite of a sole novelist. And the wind of her approach blew before her like banners. Her voice was the rumour of twenty indignant hen-coops. Was it for this brigand Douglas she had fried the choice squid and rifled her most sacred cellar ? Was it for him she had made a risotto dexterous as a honeycomb, for him chosen, as for a cardinal, fruit that would have graced Eden ? She rolled, not unlike one of those squids she had cooked that evening with such distinguished art, to

the chair occupied by the neo-Tiberius. Her apron-strings and other loose draperies waved about her as a squid's tentacles might. She filled the air with the ink of her vituperation Then, at the very chair-back, she stopped short, and stiffened, if such an anatomy might stiffen. A conflagration leaped up in her like the pyre that consumed Dido. Both her arms met about the neck of her guest, her lips swooped upon his brow, tears coursed down her cheeks. She was crooning as a nurse over her child. What was she saying? So cryptic a dialect who shall decipher? Then, with a singing of blood about the ears, I was aware of all she was saying, every word of it, each least intonation—Hostess Quickly, Falstaff, the Boar's Head Tavern . . .

'. . . swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me and make me the signora thy wife? Canst thou deny it? Did not goodwife Francesca, the butcher's wife, come in then and call me gossip Concettina? coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar; telling us she had a good dish of prawns; whereby thou didst desire to eat some; whereby I told thee they were ill for a green wound? And didst thou not, when she was gone downstairs, desire me to be no more so familiarity with such poor people, saying that ere long they should call me signora? And didst thou not kiss me and bid me fetch thee thirty liras? I put thee now to thy book-oath: deny it, if thou canst!'

Never at funeral dinner was such enthusiasm before. Gladys endeavoured to get on to the table and dance, but did not quite achieve it. Fawcett did, then pirouetted on tiptoe alone in a corner. Rivers accompanied him

by quotations from *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*. Leslie K. Dalmatic, the pale youth from the Middle West . . .

But what was wrong with Dalmatic? The yoke of inauspicious stars lay heavily, did it not, on his world-wearied flesh? What was wrong with Dalmatic? Why drooped he, why hung his hand flaccid from the wrist like a spray of laburnum? I was stabbed by a sudden sensation of pity. How many hours had passed, two, three, four, and none had bent towards the ear of Dalmatic whispering how fair he was. Two, three, four hours had passed, and no human creature had noticed him. I stooped over towards him and blustered with factitious gaiety:

'I say, Dalmatic, old man!'

He lifted a mauve eyelid in my direction.

'I say, old man! Enjoying it hugely, eh?'

Neither Oxford alone, nor America alone, could have drawled reply with so tired a prolongation of each syllable:

'I guess, boy, I 've never been so bored'—*bowhud*, he pronounced it—'in my life!'

'Poor Dalmatic,' I murmured, '*Siamo tutti e due i disillusi di Capri!*'

And a few mornings later, wandering in a tangle of flowers lifted high over a peacock sea, I realized *how* disillusioned I was—I that had been taught to expect the dull orgies of the pseudo-Tiberians, had found none other orgies than rosemary contorting drunkenly among the rocks and thyme swooning with its own scent, and young wheat piercing its own bosom with its own greenness and trees puffing into bud like an army expending its shot for sheer lunacy. And peach-blossom was chambers of carousal and bees were tipsy revellers, and they

so buzzed and bumbled and droned about the peach-blossom of Fraita, now in March, in *March*, that spring seemed annulled, summer was about me, the sun was in closer communion with me than before. I had attained not the least lovely moment of my journey sunward :

The buzzing of the drowsy bees
Doth now my springtime sense confuse.
Now am I lapped in summer. These
Convoke a garden muse.

Once by a hedge of hollyhocks
She passed, twining her sleepy hair.
The lizards in the tufted rocks
Made sly green lightnings there.

The shades of cypresses were thrown
Down the green mirrors of her lawns.
Her fountains rimmed by Parian stone
Were crowned by bronzen fawns.

Bees were bells and bells bees,
Each told the noon from his own towers,
While this sweet lady snowed my knees
With petals from all flowers.

Not from one land only they came
But from the summer of each land,
Flower of ice and flower of flame,
Rock, marsh, moorland, sand.

By hollyhocks and asphodels
She vowed she 'd come again. Her vow
Was a pale noise of bees and bells.
—I saw her not till now.

And how is it, I murmured, having next day climbed to the summit of Solaro whence the whole island swooped down from my eyes, how is it the Tiberians come and go and are replenished, but do not matter? And the vines put forth new tendrils, and the walnuts are lopped and graftings made, and in their season the small brown and mottled kids are born, and century beyond century the islanders bring in their fish or press their oil and the women bake bread or gather the green soups, and these matter greatly? And my mind passed idly from detail to mass, and fell to remarking how within so minute an area two worlds so distinct in personality as Capri and Anacapri might be contained—truly a secular speculation. For in the first all is perpendicular, I said, exciting, theatrical, as if some celestial Gordon Craig had at length achieved an ambition long frustrated. He has within his power high precipices of golden rock to arrange and rearrange, tall climbing groves of arbutus to use for shadow. Grottoes are his to play with, and arches and cypresses, all such theatre toys. Capri is a bird flinging down from mid-heaven; Anacapri is a bird launched on long flight through level planes of air. Behold how the line of Monte Solaro declines along the edge of the plateau of Anacapri. It is as if some grave queen sat on her throne, her arm, braceleted with olive, at length attaining the sea.

Here in Anacapri at length my mind paused. Here are those groves of olive which are like the wind made manifest, as susceptible as you might deem the wind's substance to be to each gradation of colour. On the dull days of sirocco, when the sea is lead, they too are like the

undergrowth of some concealed country overarched with so monstrous a roof of opaque trees, that this undergrowth might be a pasture for the pale dead. On the days of *tramontana*, the north wind, the olives are like white flame, as if knowing from what snowy lands the wind is blowing. So I have seen woodlands of whitebeam ablaze in England, 'airy abeles all on fire.' When the sun sets upon certain purple days, all the olives are innumerably starred with small flecks of gold. Should a wind arise, the air must be peopled, you think, with the countless fireflies swept out of the olive branches. And at night, when the small owl is hooting . . . But I will not penetrate the olive groves at night, when the small owl is hooting.

PART III

SUNWARD

CHAPTER ONE

THE SORRENTINE PENINSULA

I

I HAVE known stalwart walking among the Lakeland fells, singing at the end of it, camp-fires, the bliss of limbs snug in their sleeping-sack upon deep grass. I have tramped the wizard wastes of Brittany, and heard there the phantom clashing of the Arthurian chivalry. I have stepped out for arduous days over the heights of Tirol, skirting its yawning glaciers and tracing the flung nets of sunset that entangled peak beyond conquered peak; magnificent days upon the heights of Tirol, shooting chamois (had I rifle to shoot them with and had there been chamois to shoot). In quieter apple-orchard lands I have wandered and amid the thresh of weirs in the rivery lands. But walking such as these few days ahead of me I was vouchsafed on the Sorrentine peninsula, I have not known and shall not know again. It was no mere sense of liberation from the work I had set myself to do in Capri and had completed. Had I known that ten days later some schoolboy doom demanded from me a transcription of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the thought could not have irked the rhythm of my striding limbs nor interposed between me and spring, that burst from the sea in lyrics of light, from the earth in perfume, the sky in song, till all these were interfused and perfume sang, light was odorous. These days were days of interregnum between early fog, late sun, Lancashire, Sicily. But the ecstasy was not due to a state of thistledown suspension, light-headedness, light-heartedness. The ecstasy was absolute, relative neither to preceding gloom nor succeed-

ing glory. The Sorrentine peninsula seemed disconnected from the world, a great bastion of mountain, a darling intricacy of flowers, alone, absolute. So might Atlantis seem if some race of nereids inhabit there ; all its sunken towers that sway with the water's swaying, its colonnades, its own gardens blooming still with some faint ancestral recollections of their floral natures when the sun, not the sea, nurtured them, and bees fertilized them, not the unimaginable things whose tentacles thrust blindly between male and female bloom and achieve that sunken wedding. So dissociate might Atlantis seem to its inhabiting nereids, from all other landscape at the ocean's bed, whether labyrinthine tracts of coral or hog's-back dunes of sand or enormous halls eaten out of the bases of granite mountains. If you would best perceive how the peninsula stands apart and mighty, and how the spine of Monte Sant' Angelo keeps it distinct from lesser earth, ascend the slope of Monte Solaro from Anacapri to the small chapel of Santa Maria Citrella, that itself seems the mountain's own substance consenting for one moment into vault and belfry. Below you the siren world lies ; Capri itself lifting its head as if to shake from its flanks the houses that have collected like barnacles about the hulk of a sea-monster. Advancing to meet it out of the darkness and secrecy of Monte Sant' Angelo the peninsula charges, making a noise among the branches of the high chestnut woods and shaking to earth the lingering oak-leaves. The trunks of the olives twist upon themselves and their roots claw more feverishly between the hot limestone boulders. The heavy foliage of the fruit-groves creaks. Unripe lemons thud upon the ground. A noise is heard

against all the flung promontories. Waves suck and slap among the coral-bleeding grottoes. The small Siren Islands that in calm moments seem to lie against the flank of the peninsula like the Roman children at the teats of the wolf, are not seen because of the foam that has over-topped them. But the waters which Odysseus sailed are set between the two lands for ever, between Campanella and Capri ; only he might have skill to bridge them, if his dust waken out of Ithaca again.

But what if Odysseus had not shirked the siren-business so cravenly ? Penelope would have suffered, and so would the prestige of the respectable virtues. *Enoch Arden* would never have been written. That also I might have supported. He gained a great deal, of course, but there is no calculating how much he lost. He had a trick worth two of Circe's and half a dozen of Polyphemus's, and I have no doubt at all he would have held his own against the sirens when they got into the second act of their programme.

At all events, this is what Norman Douglas said that evening at the Hotel Patagna in Sant' Agata which lies on the plateau above Sorrento. If I were in those parts, he had written, I should come across him there, Sant' Agata being a likelier place than any other. So that having made up my mind that I did not care for Sorrento, where the little girls do up their hair in pigtails (and being quite certain in my mind that the nereids of Atlantis do no such thing), I set out upon the Strada Capodimonte ; and finding myself entangled before long in a complex of stony lanes cut through the lemon groves, I was taken

in hand by a mild gentleman in breeches who declared Sant' Agata to be his own destination also.

Now no human being has any right at all to look so mild as he, least of all in these dark lanes among the lemons whose only light is filtered through the plaited straw canopies that protect the fruit from frost. Even so soon I began to have my suspicions. Now we emerged upon a tortuous upland country, and the declining sun transfigured him into a mildness of Burne Jones intensity. We wound our way about paths that shelved suddenly and sent down a detritus of complaining sand into the pits below. Now ravines debouched upon us from secret nuclei of the hills. Haunted knolls stood out against the yellow air, waving their boughs at us. His voice became silkier and milder the more forbiddingly trees and rocks menaced us and cliffs gaped at our feet. We had long left the last vestige of a path, his own way being, he assured me, a quicker route by well over an hour. I never knew any one as mild as he save an initiate of the Close Brethren that directed a recreation-hut in Abbeville during the war. The initiate had a little nose, pale pink and pale blue like a sucking pig's. There was no tint in his eyes whatsoever. He prefaced each meal with an enormous impromptu prayer that lasted several times longer than the meal itself. It was discovered that a large lady from Abbeville shared his slumbers nightly, and that his office had enriched his private fortune by fifteen pounds sterling per week. But there are graver crimes than peculation and incontinence. A doctor he was, I gathered, the mild gentleman that was conducting me to Sant' Agata. The

more agile he would be in the matter of a little swift blood-letting. Still we climbed into stranger and stranger woodlands. What was that bulge in his hip-pocket? These woods, he said, were the hiding-places of brigands in mid-winter; they had their homes in the brushwood-screened caves down among the ravines we had skirted. Here and there a lopped tree lurked squat in the half-light like a waiting man. A root tripped me forward against him and I clawed out against his hip-pocket. Oh yes. . . . It *was* a revolver he carried there. So that was to be the way of it? Well, we would see. I kept a foot or two in his rear, wondering what was the benefit of a foot or two's grace in a revolver's range. His wife . . . he was saying. He had a wife . . . ah! We were in a climbing glade of chestnuts that soared like ghosts in the timid air. '. . . just going to Egypt together when she was asphyxiated, *la poveretta.*' Since then it had been enough for him to ply the humble trade of country doctor out of the world's way in Sant' Agata.

I disliked acutely this third alternative. Distinguished company. . . . Desdemona, the Princes in the Tower. . . . What was the use of worrying any further?

And I didn't. We had attained the mountain-top. To our right rose against bands of brassy and bronzen sky, the *Deserto*, a monastery once, an orphanage now. Below us twinkled the lights of Sant' Agata's single street.

'So you *are* a country doctor!' I said to him, gripping his hand powerfully.

'I am!' he said, a little puzzled. He could not quite explain the fervour of my corroboration.

'I *said* you were!' I emphasized severely, as if he had contradicted it. Then a surge of emotion welled up into my throat. 'Your poor wife! Your poor, poor wife!'

He took out a handkerchief from his hip-pocket. The bulge disappeared. (Had I fallen against a trouser-button? Was it all a nightmare in a chestnut-wood?) A cool air blew down the village street. The doctor bade me good-bye at the arched entrance to the drive of the Petagna.

'Good-bye!' said I.

'Good-bye!' he said.

We replaced our handkerchiefs in our hip-pockets.

II

It was Sylvia who came to the door of the hotel, Sylvia, whose *polpette* are so fragrant and so savoury that any queen might eat them, and curtsy thanks to Sylvia. At night, like Medea, she goes forth gathering aromatic herbs out of her garden, when the moon is misty, and no man can see if it is hyssop or basil or marjoram she gathers. Nutmeg in the morning sun she grinds, and she minces the meat ere the sun be high. Then, at noon, she will look you in the eyes, determine if you deserve them, then set her *polpette* before you, steaming and savoury as the grills in the kitchen of heaven.

'*Signor Douglas sta qui?*'

'*Ecco, signore!*' She pointed across a dark intervening room to a single light that burned in the dining-room beyond. I went forward, and halted for one moment outside the glass door. Douglas sat alone before a large

table occupied with dish upon dish, bottle upon bottle. He was holding out to the light a tumbler of red wine that shone like a black ruby. The priestliness of his countenance was refined at this moment into the fleshless bliss of St. Jerome in the desert contemplating Truth. He lowered the tumbler to his lips.

'Did you,' I asked, entering, 'ever asphyxiate *your* wife?'

'Rarely!' he said.

'Nor I!' I insisted.

'Sylvia!' he proclaimed, 'Sylvia! *Ancora qualche bottiglia di vino! Ci resta anche un piatto di polpette?*'

Hearing that we intended, Douglas and I, to make our way down the mountain's southern slope into the cove of Crapolla, Luigi, the landlord's nephew, appointed himself our guide. It was Luigi's custom, we learned, to come in with a bucket every morning from his father's little property over the hill to collect the scraps for the pigs and chickens at home. Whenever he received the information that *forestieri* had arrived, the animals were at once driven out of his mind and he at once stationed himself at the foot of the stairs till the *forestieri* made their appearance. Then he elaborated the plans he had made for their entertainment and even went some way towards reconciling their own with his. Then he allowed them to recover their breath while he disappeared into the kitchen to order the dishes that should be laid before them on their return. There was a sort of holy hideousness about Luigi, such as savage tribes bow the knees to with electric promptness. His mouth stretched far and

humorous like an alligator's. He had long arms and no legs like a gnome. His ears were set high towards the top of the skull and waved playfully, as Luigi bade them. Who could resist Luigi? He stooped to be our guide? We were the debtors, not he.

It is true that there is no man in Italy, and certainly none outside it, who knows this country a tithe as well as the author of *Sirenland*. If anywhere in some trackless gully a curiously contorted olive grows, he is not unaware of it. Where the lithospermum is bluer and asphodel taller than elsewhere he will lead you by tracks the goatherds do not contemplate with pleasure. He even seems to be aware at the tide's ebb what flotsam the next sea will bring. But Douglas, after all, is a Scotsman, and Luigi is a Latin, a Greek, a Pelasgian. The sum of Douglas's years and mine was to be expressed in a ratio of time; Luigi's eleven related only to eternity. Luigi one hour old in his cradle, screwing his black eyes, was not a moment younger. Luigi at ninety, tottering in and out over his great-grandson's threshold, will be not a moment older. He darted ahead, whooping.

First was a mountain-top to attain, and then a deep cleft in it worn by an almost extinct stream. Bellying shrubs of euphorbia thrust themselves among the boulders; trees of Mediterranean heath grew left and right, each odorous as an alley of limes in blossom. Purple anemones whose stamens were slim rods of indigo twinkled out of the shadowy places and retreated into them again. Ground-ivy festooned the rocks; acanthus and lily leaves uncurled in the hollows. Below us extended the Gulf of Salerno, the coast curving round to Paestum and

Calabria. At our feet lay the Galli Islands, heaving with the heaving sea. Lizards darted like light, and were petrified into chiselled jade. What was Luigi after? He had plucked a long stem of grass and was making a slip knot at its extremity. Then carefully he poised himself behind a boulder and bent his body forward where it cast no shadow. He held the noose at the mouth of a crevice, and waited there, himself carven like the lizard ten feet away or the boulder over which he was bending. Then suddenly his body swayed, straightened, quivered. High in blue air he held the noose, triumphant. A lizard squirmed in it, incredibly humiliated, lashing his tail like any leviathan churning the sea.

'What happens now?' I asked.

'What should happen? Nothing?' He flung the lizard away throttling, the sky blazing into its tiny eyes, and all the air a thunder of iron-winged hawks.

'Not so swift, my young friend!' I seized the lasso again. But how to free the beast from that rhinoceros cord? Impossible to put a finger under the knot without crushing the lizard's brains. You could not cut it with a pen-knife without scoring a great wound in the emerald flesh. More and more desperately the little lungs gasped for air. The sky was a hot brazen lid, the hawk-wings drummed.

Luigi smiled at me pitifully out of his oblique eyes. The extremities of his mouth widened away monstrously. 'Poor fool!' He held the lizard's head down with the base of a stalk of asphodel. He held out another stalk to me with a toothy edge.

'Start cutting!' he exclaimed, as one whose orders are not lightly disobeyed. I sawed frantically at the noose.

'*Piano, piano!*' he commanded.

My saw slipped, the lizard's head twisted from under the stalk of asphodel. His teeth snapped at my saw and ground there in his anguish, sending an intense spasm along my arm and down the length of my spine. I should not think a crocodile *in extremis* would fasten its jaws more terribly about some floating trunk.

'What did I say?' Luigi rapped out smartly.

I resumed my saw and moved it forward, coolly this time, methodically. Presto! The beast was free.

The expression had returned into Luigi's eyes of pity, profound pity.

'And perhaps,' said Douglas, 'everything that has compounded you, your race, your environment, all you have ever eaten and drunk, all you have ever thought, all is culminated in this. You have rescued a lizard that would have strangled but for you.'

'There is not a single lizard . . .' I began. Luigi was listening intently, though he understood, of course, not a word we were saying.

'What of the fly,' he asked, 'that this same lizard is devouring now? Why does not the *signore* rescue the fly? And what of the bird that will this evening devour the lizard? And what of the man who will to-morrow shoot the bird?'

It was time to resume my dignity. 'Bring me,' I ordered, 'that bunch of blue flowers in the rock above there!'

He fled like the loosened lizard.

Nearer and nearer to us came the sound of the sea. 'Look,' said Douglas suddenly, 'on the face of the rock at your left hand!'

I looked. I held my breath with wonder. Clear as the little reptiles that twinkled about our feet, the fossils of reptiles millions of years old lay embedded in the stone. It seemed as if those dead, like these living, had also suddenly become conscious of some doom impending, whether some winged terror, or some monster thrusting through the sea's primal ooze; that they too had stiffened suddenly, hoping that those hostile eyes might not distinguish them from the stuff they lay on. And their hearts had ceased beating aeon beyond aeon.

'Look at this creature here!' I cried. 'Twisting its jaw round upon its tail! Poor devil!'

'It must have been Luigi who caught it in his noose. Isn't it precisely the attitude of that other reptile, twenty minutes ago?'

Luigi nodded his head sagely. There was not a word out of this alien tongue he did not divine, an infallible, breathless lip-reading, eye-reading, hand-reading, a reading of every inflection of the voice.

'*C'ero io!*' he cried. 'It was me! Who else could it have been?'

And a moment later he was playing among the tumbled fragments of the old monastery that stood here, overlooking the colony of fishermen that lived thick in the cove of Crapolla two thousand years ago.

At length we had descended upon the yellow beach

that had been inviting us to its soft footing and cool airs out of the windless noon above and the craggy limestone descent. A few fishermen were drying their nets, others scrubbing their boats. The rest passed in and out among the airless, lightless holes which were their homes, built into the clefts in the mountain-side. Neither woman nor girl was anywhere to be seen. It seemed as if this minute colony of fishermen had forsworn the world, deliberately renounced mating and increase. In a generation their oldest men would be long dead, their lads bearded and greying men, launching their boats with more racking of the loins than five and ten years ago. In three generations, the last of them all sat on the yellow beach, passing his fingers through the long white tangles of his beard, or playing with shells. A season or two later, and the limpets gathered about the bleached ribs of the last boat that had put forward from this strand. There was only silence and the coming and the going sea.

It was necessary to anticipate this far-off, morose event. Douglas had already asked if a skiff were free to take us out westward under the lee of the cliffs. The naked-footed lads prepared it, and brought the blocks forward for launching it into the winking water. Douglas was engaged meanwhile in deep and friendly converse with the men. There was not one of them he did not know, and who their parents were, and what illnesses they had endured, if any, and what their tastes were in wine. And the meat they eat once or twice a year, whether it was cheaper nowadays at Nerano or up at Sant' Agata. And poor old Garibaldi, oh yes, alas, he died years ago. You will see his effigy in the book called

Sirenland. But he had his successor to do the honours of Crapolla for us, with a nose peaked like a Norseman's galley. He seemed a sailor that had, alone out of all Odysseus' crew, escaped shipwreck off Thrinacia. He it was, with another, who rowed us out into the waters of enchantment.

A kestrel flew powerfully by over the lofty crags, trailing its shadow swiftly. His mate followed, larger than himself, her tail blue as steel. The world was a symphony of burning yellow and burning blue, all other tints being subordinated to them. Flying against sea and sky the gulls were one, against the gnarled and massy cliffs, the other. The scanty green that had taken root upon the few yards of flatness the Siren Islands allowed, was steeped in blue and yellow. Luigi's face, strangely immobile now, seemed to shine out of layers of coloured air. His slanting eyes did not move. He was awed and hushed, communing with the influences which had wrought him. I had not seen his eleven years look so timeless, so transcendent, all that day. The child's uncouthness took on a quality of the grandiose, like the twisted and gaping rocks. The rowers seemed to have been born to no other function than steadily, rhythmically, to part the blue and yellow waters, yellow at the crest of their minute waves where the sun sloped down their ridges, blue in their troughs. Now we were passing under the tiny island of Isca, now we were entering the Grotto of the Wild Pigeons that lies hard against it. The rim of the water against its flanks was marked by a line of coral—as if the edge of water had lanced the rock's body and it bled in oozy congealed globes. Above

the coral the rock was amethyst. Blue and green-blue lights flared up and swam moonily over the broad arch that swung about our heads. In the dark corners of the grotto pointed tongues of water thrust and flickered into subterranean mystery. As we withdrew, we noted the bare tortured branches of the wild fig that grows above the cavern's lintel. The men once more at their oars, Luigi once more somnolent under the gunwale.

We were at the haunted beach of Recomone.

'*Addio!*' exclaimed Douglas to the boatmen as they thrust out, not without pleasure, from the beach. 'When you come up for the winter, we shall drink a litre or two together, no?'

'Don't forget, *signore*!'

'*Come dimenticare?*'

We turned to the strange flotsam of this unfooted beach. It was evident that Luigi was not at all certain whether he liked the look of Recomone. But it would never do for a guide to confess that the fear of the *manicielli*, the little dwarfs, had kept him from the place till this very day. He cast his eyes about warily as he made his way across the shingle.

We climbed the brow of the mountain to our left, and the Gulf of Salerno broadened slowly again towards Calabria. Such a hunger began to gnaw at us that when we attained the wild remote hamlet of Nerano, we greeted it with an exultation like Christian's on sighting the towers of Zion; an emotion more clayey perhaps in nature, but just as fervent. We entered a cavern more obscure than the Grotto of the Wild Pigeons—the local grocer, public-house, tobacconist, and post-office.

Stalactites were not lacking of phosphorescent salame that dripped yard beyond yard from the invisible roof ; cheeses heaped upon each other climbed unsteadily upwards like stalagmites. And if you had been waiting all day for a *maniciello's* appearance, what of the twisted little mannikin with carroty hair and red-rimmed eyes that cut great hunks of bread for us with a knife like a scimitar, and handed us silky cheeses of *cacciocavallo*, and poured out for us litres of torrid wine, and for Luigi, like the virtuous little boy he was, produced bottles of nasty *gazosa* coloured like a tray of jewels and consummately tasteless ?

Afternoon broadened as we ascended Monte San Costanzo and looked towards Capri, that seemed from this eminence an awful grandeur ; and below us, tumbling to the sea, were rocks in ruin piled :

Rock after rock in ruin descending,
Rock after rock to the sea's brim,
As if Polyphemus, his great thews rending,
Had flung them at Jove and Jove at him.

Blue flakes of dusk descended upon us as we climbed towards the uplands of Sant' Agata, by way of the church of Santa Maria delle Neve which stands in the centre of bleak spirit-haunted lands. Had there not been *manicielli* in these parts before, they could not have withstood the lure of so spectral a sunset, nor of the black-cowled cypresses that crowded about the forlorn cemetery. Trees and rocks were phantasmally translucent. We stared through substance into ghost. Luigi whinnied like a frightened horse, then took both our hands and set his eyes straight upon the far lights of Sant' Agata and his

heart upon the vineyard on its farther slopes where his mother that moment was cooking a mess of beans upon her charcoal fire.

Not far from the road stood the skeleton of a large house. As it came into sight beyond a turn of the road, Luigi's hands stiffened about our own. His feet pattered forward anxiously. A rich American-Italian had built the place, having learned in Brooklyn the inefficacy of *manicielli* and having convinced himself in Sorrento that if any remained on the plateau here, the church of Santa Maria delle Neve had long ago annulled their malefic influences. One builder after another had fallen from his ladder and smashed his skull. The cement would not set. The roof would not abide. The walls slid. The floors gaped. And the rich American-Italian had grown more and more rabid in his lust for the house, in his hatred for the *manicielli*, and another builder and another smashed his skull. Then no workman came near the place at all, and the American-Italian himself took in hand trowel and mortar, lath and brick. But the cement would not set, the roof would not abide. The walls slid. The floors gaped. And he stiffened his obstinate proud mouth. And at night, in one room or another, he would attack ceiling or wall or floor. In that room you would see a light burning, a blue and smoky light.

In a room on the basement floor, to the right of the gaunt threshold, burned, as we passed, a blue and smoky light.

'Who?' I asked tremulously.

'Who?' echoed Luigi, a catch in his throat. His hands were vices about our hands.

'*Wandervögel!*' said Douglas firmly.

'*Wandervögel?*' I repeated, doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before. So that now to still the beating . . .

Luigi emitted a sudden howl of terror. If mere *manicielli* were capable of deeds so desperate, what of this more sulphurous category of evil spirits, what of *Wandervögel*?

The last bar of alluvial chocolate in my pocket did not console him. It was not until he was allowed to squirt a couple of syphons of seltzer-water at the pageantry of cats that enfiladed through the dining-room of the Petagna that night, that he recovered his equanimity.

'I love cats,' said Douglas, as Luigi was carried protesting loudly by a Petagna henchman to the paternal vineyard.

'Why?' I asked.

'I hate dogs!' he growled. 'I can't bear their damned gratefulness. Ugh! Look at this liver-coloured brute here! *Esci!*' he shooed it away. 'Look at those filthy faithful eyes!'

'If you have such an affection for cats, why do you allow small children to squirt seltzer-water at them?'

'To prevent them,' he replied, 'ever feeling grateful! They don't!'

In Luigi's father's vineyard next morning, over a premature glass of Luigi's father's strong red wine, I said good-bye to my friends, for the road to Positano called me, to go out beyond hill and hollow. To Douglas the angle of Salvatore's nose (for that was the name of

Luigi's father) and the tint of Elisabetta, his wife's hair, spoke volumes of local family history. 'Your grandfather,' said he, 'came over from Ferrandina in Basilicata, in connection with that little business at the *farmacista's*? Isn't that true?'

Salvatore was almost certain that some *farmacista* or another had played a large part in the destinies of his family.

'It was,' said Douglas, 'the *farmacista's* wife, to be exact.'

'That must have been the way of it,' agreed Salvatore.

'I would have given anything for that little bronze saint he found under his lupins.'

'It was a pity he had to come away in such a hurry,' mourned Salvatore. 'With what pleasure would I have handed it over to the *signore*!'

'A rare and curious Osiris,' Douglas explained for my benefit. 'How the devil did it get into Ferrandina?'

'But the *signori* must fill their glasses. Permit! Luigi! Luigi!'

The young gentleman was rolling empty barrels under the vines and beating them like tom-toms. Salvatore brought his powerful hand down on Luigi's head, with impact enough to stun a horse. Luigi merely shook his head as if a fly had troubled him, and went on clattering his barrels.

'Ever since his elder brother died of the influenza,' sighed his father, 'it has been impossible to keep him in hand. The War,' he added, as if it were a synonym for influenza, 'has troubled the very stones.'

'Your wife——' Douglas began.

'Who knows?' interrupted Salvatore, but without

committing himself deeply. The less said about wives the better. Then the memory of his misfortunes got the better of him.

'When my other wife and two of our sons died of the influenza,' said Salvatore, 'it was then I married Elisabetta. She is Luigi's aunt, *signore*, not his mother. She makes a good wife, *però*.'

Luigi was chasing the cow about the vineyard, kicking it in the udders playfully. A picture suddenly presented itself in my mind of a high windy farm on the hills near Paisley, and a small boy of Luigi's age kissing the calves between the eyes and throwing his arms about the necks of the cows, telling his troubles to them, asking their advice. Each of the two score sucking-pigs in the sties had its own sweet and silly name—Violet, Narcissus, Iolanthe, Gardenia. I seized a lemon that hung from the canopy overhead and hurled it at Luigi's nose with astonishing accuracy. He sat down and contemplated me.

'This accursed influenza,' wept Salvatore, 'all my four sons, one after the other; how can it be expected that he should not grow up a brigand, a bandit?'

Elisabetta appeared with a baby a few months old in her arms.

'There is no time to lose,' explained Salvatore. We looked away from the child carefully, lest we be suspected of the evil eye, and pronounced our guarded encomiums.

'Look at her,' said Luigi gravely, 'she has another baby coming!' He sat cross-legged against the roots of a vine, like a small Italian Buddha. There were no secrets from Luigi, generation, birth or death.

'There is no time to lose,' corroborated Salvatore, as if he and Luigi had entered into a mutual understanding with regard to the replenishment of their stock.

There was something proud and withdrawn about the woman. Did these men consider her an urn for the reception of their seed? She had secrets hidden from them. She turned away from us and walked towards the house again, her body swaying.

The sun was climbing the heavens and threatened to make midnoon walking heavy.

'Luigi,' I said, 'when you are elected deputy . . .'

'When I am elected deputy, I shall be married. You will be *compare* to my first-born. The old man here,' he pointed a thumb towards his father, 'he will be dead.'

'He will have made up,' I said, 'for this wicked influenza.'

Salvatore lifted his hands in a manner half-promissory, half-deprecatory.

'For you, Douglas, remains the quest of St. Osiris, eh?'

'Little else,' he said.

'Good-bye, Douglas!'

'Good-bye, young man!'

Salvatore and he lifted a glass to me as I made off eastward towards Monte Torre and the village of Fontanelle, where the anemones crowd between the paving-stones. Luigi was once more intent upon his pursuit of the cow. The instincts of the child were beyond cruelty and kindness. The words themselves he would not learn for many years, the emotions never. There was something isolated about him and absolute, like the peninsula that

had given him birth ; buttressed and removed from ordinary human qualities as Monte Sant' Angelo buttresses the peninsula from Italy and holds it self-contained and separate. Good-bye, Italianate Buddha of the oblique mythological mouth ! Sant' Agata will see me again, be sure ! I will lay my godchild upon my arms, knowing that Salvatore, Luigi and he, are lying there, a few pounds of olive flesh, the daemon of their peninsula.

III

I swung out into the broad day, the day which became a fantasy of anemones. Certain of the great days of memory are bound up for me in this way with the roots of some certain flowers, so that the day itself and the flower itself sway upon the same stalk and occupy with the same petals the one arch of the heavens. There was a day by the Yorkshire Ouse which was no more than autumn crocuses from the Pennines to the eastern capes. Harfleur holds a day which was daffodils, and the very trees which gave the daffodils their shade seemed to be merely their ministers. Once was a noon in Thessaly so ardent that my leaden eyes looking along the gullies seemed to see heat manifest, and found it to be a wilderness of blue thistles, twanging like wires. Once at Iffley was a single anemone, but the shade held me and this creature hidden all a tranced noon and evening. That may have been why the nakedness of these anemones in the Sorrentine wilds so flicked my vagrant lips into rhyme ; but also because the sea was not wine-dark now but had the darkness of anemones, and the sky was an anemone suspended over the world from some stalk that

soared up from the southern constellations amid a whistling of meteors :

Anemones
The shades do please,
But now they court the sun.
He at the sight
With lips of light
Kisses them—all but one.

And she this last,
More coy, more chaste,
Than all her flowery peers
The willows there
Bent down towards her
At Iffley by the weirs. . . .

(Galloping, galloping away, poor runaway mind, from olive and myrtle, tree-heath and upland oak. Poplars stand there in that land and their noise is the noise of the waters. There is no distinguishing between them. Did we desire it ? Had not the whole world abolished categories, distinctions ?)

I quenched my drouth
In the moist red mouth
That noon-parched lad might see.
No, among these
Anemones,
None was so fair as she.

But stooping down to pluck a Sorrentine anemone, the noise of the Thames weirs ceased. How fair was the zone of leaves that half-way down the stalk made the

flower's calyx ! With what grace rose the stalk hence to maintain the petals, through what gradations of green and paler green, silver-brown like the turned earth under olives, silver at length and yellow at the petals' confluence . . . all bloomed over with a faint down, all supple and strong in its proportion as a snake's body ! Pale purple in the reverse of the petals, in the obverse a more royal purple to draw down the hovering bee ; and in the fragile veins a spilth of indigo pollen.

Narrow walls lead down into Fontanelle. The cypresses top them like the spears of troops waiting massed for a sortie. But beyond where the mountain path finds its way into the great peninsula road, there are no cypresses, no anemones. All was torrid and tawny rock as I strode mile upon mile from the declining sun, where promontory beyond promontory diverged from the central spine. Precipices crashed to my feet and away from them into the violet gulfs. Towers and domes, minarets and pinnacles, as of an Aztec city, or an older, engoldened and empurpled by the setting sun, climbed and crested the mountain-side. High from the dusking and rocky stillness a haunted crying, an owl crying lonelily.

Crying owl out of the thick trees under Glanegla, ghost of my dead friend ; crying owl out of a cage in a lonelier odious land, owl with detesting and miserable eyes, uttering a choked cry at midnight from your cage like an owl in hell ; owl in the groves of Anacapri, hooting passionlessly, like the last meaningless sobs of a child that cries with surfeit of the world's kindness ; crying owl from a barn above the stubble of Suffolk fields, crying

owl from the towers and domes, minarets and pinnacles not built by hands . . . even you that ceased your haunted crying lest any movement of air at all suspend the poised and breathless enchantment that made of sea a shadow, of stone a spectre.

Great rocks that would crash over
If you but breathed at them,
Seas that would boil and roar
Against this moon-high shore,
If stirred by a lily's stem.

Owl that hast ceased thy crying,
Blood that has checked thy flow,
Once there were sea and rock. . . .
Like a thought or a blue smoke,
They faded long ago.

Time ceased. There was no space. I stood aloof from both, hearkening to my silenced blood. My skull and the arch of sky were the same, my feet and the feet of the mountains. My walking-stick was Igdrasil, the Tree of Heaven.

And then of a moment, and with the noise of cataracts, I was aware that Igdrasil cast a shadow upon the roadway where no shadow had been. A moon had gathered strength in the sky during I know not what moments or hours of my withdrawal. Nothing stood single, shadow and substance became implicate again, movement and sound. The owl was crying again out of its moony and rocky stillness. The precipice-skirting road ended suddenly in mid-air as if the abrupt wrenching into

motion again of the enginery of nature had torn a great length of road from its iron moorings. I made a crescent detour over the gulf and descended where the two lips gaped at each other across it like a yawn petrified for ever. My stick made a hollow noise amid the rocks, its shadow was black as hair. Behold, here was Positano, thrust into its ravine, and breaking from it in foamy terraces into the sea, breaking in fear from the crying owl and the witless spell of those moony uplands. Shall time cease for us in Positano, and space have no being? By the orange-blossom that scented my dinner that night, no; and by my cool sheets, no; and by the sun that next morning sweltered upon Montepertuso, and myself mopping my brow under the wind-and-water-worn grottoes, no; space shall not cease nor time have no being.

But as for that collapse in the road which had drawn me up sharp on my descent into Positano, only a few minutes after I arrived in that town I learned, and not wholly with equanimity, that it had all happened in a far more naturalistic manner than I had deemed, and for several days now the traffic between Positano and Sorrento had been suspended. Last Tuesday—or Wednesday was it? —Peppino had been driving a pig in his pony-cart to that robber over in Massa. The sun had not yet risen, and Peppino sat huddled and dozing over the reins while the animal jogged along the edge of the abyss, as he had done before and would do again—when this accursed landslip had been righted. Then all of a moment Peppino was aware that the cart was no longer in motion, whether it had stopped an hour or a minute ago. Still dozing he reached for the whip and laid to about the pony's

ears, for asleep, drunk, or dead, Peppino was always capable of using his whip. None the less the cart did not move, and Peppino began to realize that unless something happened he would have to wake up in good earnest, which would be a pity. So, still dozing, he lunged away violently at the beast, but the beast took it all with patience, just laying his ears back horizontally. Apparently even so early in the history of the episode people were saying (and Peppino as eloquently as any) that the pony, imitating the illustrious example of Balaam's ass, had given tongue. The cynics declared that the pig had squealed, nothing more ; but that, in any case, Peppino was not the sort of person on whom Providence wasted its miracles, which, in all conscience, were few enough these days. So Peppino had been forced to blink himself into wakefulness. At the very moment of sundawn he beheld that alarming phenomenon of which I have already spoken, the *frano*, in short, the landslide. He had been the first to report it in Positano. He declared it was the end of the world, and one or two old women had believed him and waddled off wailing to church. Although by now it was obvious that Peppino had exaggerated the gravity of his discovery, every one agreed that his pony was *proprio cristiano* ; and this was more than could be said regarding Balaam's ass, which had the misfortune to be born before the era of redemption.

IV

It may have been Peppino's pony that awakened me next morning, but I woke joyously and joyously climbed to the heights again. High reared the buff crags of

Montepertuso where the dun stalactites sweated from the foreheads of the grottoes, even as I sweated that beheld them. On each tiny plateau the lizards sported, those wily innocents. I could not condemn their appetite for flies, which are at least wholesome, if they are not good. But when now and again a brute slunk into a bush of spurge with a fat worm hanging about his chops, I could well understand his furtive air. Reptile is as reptile does, and if the higher order in the same genus does not support the lower, what happens to the cosmic proprieties generally? If the order of European trader had not so sedulously supported the South Sea Islander, who knows how many diseases might never have been introduced into those parts to instruct the natives in the holy catechism of pain? Glowing with righteous wrath, I made a swift movement in the air over one of these quasi-cannibalistic lizards. He dropped his prey and darted forward two or three feet. There, paralysed with fear, he came to rest, his feet asplay on the rock, pretending to be a leaf, a twig. Again my stick moved. Once more he darted forward, and once more, always within one doomed circle of a few feet. His monstrous and vicious jaw was outlined against the sky. His eyes were beads. Poor brute, had he but slipped a foot or two over the boulder's edge that was the very brink of a precipice, not all India could have subjected him to me.

At the first of the few houses that constitute the mountain village of Nocelle, a dog showed his teeth at me more ferociously than is the wont of dogs in these parts, and I made the usual gesture of stooping to lift a

stone, without sending him shuddering away. It was curious, for the life of dogs here is one perpetual discipline of fear. I had seen that morning a dog in Positano that limped on three legs, the fourth, bound crudely in splints, hanging loose. A smashed leg, though painful, was easy to understand. What new subtlety of persecution, the eyes inquired, did all this swaddling mean? As I passed he looked at me as if grateful that I did not then and there smash the remaining limbs. Climbing Montepertuso, I overtook a donkey that was scrabbling up the path bent concave under two bags of flour larger than himself. The flesh of the forelegs was eaten away at the knees, so that a drop of blood oozed slowly out each time he bent them. Where else than in Italy would not a donkey have brayed the sun from the sky? But the beast that climbed Montepertuso wept silently, forgetting his one far fierce hour and sweet. There was a shout about his ears, but from that other beast that goaded him. If there had been palms before his feet, the blood would have fallen upon them.

There was once a Tirolese donkey that climbed with me from Mayrhofen to Günstling. With what stony impassivity he munched the path-side grasses if his master stayed behind to dally a stolid moment with a heavy-footed mountain maid. Feeling that the donkey abased me, crushed my pride into the thistles, all that I have of kindly feeling towards animals ebbed from me. I kicked him and pulled his ears and chafed the bit. I thwacked him, kicked him again, heaped upon him a number of pitch-black maledictions. He munched the path-side grasses. Had he but been an Italian donkey

. . . halt ! I call to mind he was less a donkey than a mule. Had he been an Italian mule, he would have galloped on at breakneck speed if I had merely, like the heroine in a recent sonnet, pursed up my mouth as if pronouncing the word 'one.'

Compare with this recalcitrant Tirolese mule any beast that draws a load for men in Naples. If you but try to pat the blunt sad nose, he rears wildly, as if expecting villainy more ingenious than any he knows. Enough for him are those familiar fires that jerk at the corners of his jaw. He has felt them before. He will feel them again. He never does not feel them. Glory be to the Neapolitan societies that have these affairs in hand, but there are doleful creatures still on the Via Roma. But never more doleful than when they summon all their little energies and break into a travesty of those debonair canters of beasts running care-free over happier lands. Soon the head falls forward again and the tired eyes blink, the spittle drips from the bit to the ground and the driver lifts to heaven that curious complaint, which is at once a cry of 'What have *I* done, Lord, *I*, to deserve this thing ! ' and 'Hell ! won't I just catch the bleeder a welt acrorst the jore ! '

Even cats in Italy . . . perhaps too few syphons of seltzer-water have been despatched upon them . . . even cats in Southern Italy have lost their privilege of colossal ingratitude. Even cats look up at you for a kind word. What would you, butterflies even, as I passed among the terraces of Nocelle, even butterflies that had hardly shaken out their wings, fluttered pathetically against my cheek asking for pity.

All the purple-grey rock where Nocelle clings was a complex of rosemary, that errant rosemary named of Capri, which twines among hedges like honeysuckle and over the level like bindweed. The hazels which give the place its name seemed invisible because of it. What shapes of pruning-hook and cutlass, pierced heart and true-lover's-knot, Celtic cross and Byzantine cross, intertwined Nocelle and held together the high-perched houses! Even as in Ischia you feel that the whole island must be overspread by the trailers that grow from some single vast integral vine, so Nocelle seemed one single rosemary, disporting itself into every arabesque on the edge of that concave gulf. It is easier to arrive at these hill-top villages than to find your way out again. Not merely does the rosemary tangle your feet, but the path you have trodden becomes many paths, and these perhaps an edge of soil along a vine-terrace. I blundered among pigs that snorted and figs that sprouted, wondering whether in Nocelle was any place where I might quench my thirst or whether I should ever find my way thence to quench it in Agerola. I had not eaten for many hours, but I was conscious only of a most sacred thirst. Yet rosemary tangled my feet the more inextricably and I began to muse, looking perpendicularly down into the blue depths, how easy a leap would land me into how much water. At this hazardous moment an old woman, very old, with a scarlet handkerchief about her head and earrings jostling about her neck, appeared from the parted straw curtains of a lemonry—she, and her husband. Inquiring from them whether there was wine to buy in Nocelle (my tongue tasted like gravel) they bade me follow

them. Terrace upon terrace we mounted amid pigs that snorted and pigs that did not snort till we came to their small square house, white-painted, all clambered over with rosemary and smelling of the sun. Hence their numerous progeny, one after another, had set forth upon the gold trail to America. Now none but they were left to make the year's wine. Would I excuse it? '*Proprio naturale*,' so much could be said for it. *Would* I excuse it! I threw myself on an odorous heap of dried fodder against the sun-smouldering wall. Sunlight came out of its pores, ancient and compelling, like music from the strings of a noble violin. Forth they issued with a crystal cruse of wine, so large, I have never seen larger offered to a single man; the cruse of so goodly a shape and clear a substance that it had been a privilege to drink from it had it contained only that sun-soaked air. But there was wine in it. Though I had quenched my thirst with but a quarter of its contents, dared I leave a drop to insult my hosts or abase myself? Dared I? The midmost essence of that sun it was, caught by subtle lures out of the unstable air. Dared I?

Hence these lines, I doubt not. For taking out *The Iron Age* to read that night in Amalfi, the virgin end-pages were no longer so. And my own script—that, alas, there was no doubting:

They, the old woman with the fierce kerchief
And her old ram, wrinkled like a scorched leaf,
Have given me wine to drink while I recline
Under a fourposter of sprouting vine.
Have they drugged me then? O how my silly head
Leans to my blue shirt like a log of lead.

And lizards' tails, see how they twine my feet,
Like a monk's vision, Cross and Christ complete.
Below me rosemary and tree-heath spend
Their odours down the cliff. They only end
Where the gulf drops in the blue embracing sea
Embracing them and the noon and singing me.
This is not only wine, not only sun
That runs in my veins as only poisons run.
—Therefore once only, once before I die,
I must trace the gold flight of each butterfly.
The air is starry with them as I drink
This bandit wine. Their wings and my eyes wink.
One 's yellow as Solfatara. (The fissures there
Sprout into sulphur like a young Goth's hair.)
One's paler than snow. (Even where blanched winds call
Down the snow-muffled crags of Fotscherthal,
Which is in Austria where the rash Inn twists.
—I am hardly sure if Austria exists.)
Others are coral like a Nereid's kiss.
(The grotto against Isca bleeds like this.)
O thou sweet poison in my lolling head,
Montepertuso, I shall soon be dead.
What better death, then? Swooning terraces
That scale with olive and vine the mountain's knees,
Now you relax your hold. Now the wild fig
Twists his thick branches in a dying jig.
What better death, lizard and butterfly?
O my kind Fate, that this is the death I die!

I gather I was presented to the sons-in-law and daughters of the old couple at some stage during the afternoon, for

there arrived a moment when I was aware that the daughters stood about me like caryatids, bearing large sacks of *roba minestra* upon their heads, and the sons-in-law, laden with my rucksacks, were beckoning me into the mountains again. How is it, I asked of myself, that my rucksack, by some process of parthenogenesis, has yielded many? For unless, like some inverse Cybele, I have many backs, I cannot have set forth from Positano with as many rucksacks to ensconce in them as I behold now. And why, when they address me, do all the daughters and sons-in-law address me with one voice? Then I smiled darkly as one that makes a discovery. There was but one son-in-law, one daughter, one rucksack.

'Agerola?' the son-in-law said. 'By a fortuitous combination of circumstances, Agerola is our own objective this afternoon. It is truly astonishing how from what diverse corners of this grotesque little planet a gentleman of your discernment, sir, and, if I may anticipate, your generosity, how such an one as you, sir, and such ones as ourselves—mere hinds, as you perceive, shall I say just such simple forthright creatures as the poet represents himself to be—you remember?

Persicos odi, puer, apparatus,
Displicent nexae philyra coronae.

Dear, dear Horace! So infallibly the chaste thought, the *mot juste.* Why indeed should we not be content with the indigenous myrtle? I am all against these innovations in the garland line, as I am surely not over bold in assuming yourself to be? Or do I perhaps err? You have no objection, it may be, to one of the less flamboyant Persian motifs. . . .'

I rose from the bed of warm fodder where I had so blithely convoked Fotscherthal and Isca, concluding the dexterous quotation of my friend with, I flattered myself, signal appositeness :

Neque te ministrum
Dedecet myrtus, neque me sub arcta
Vite bibentem.

The prospect of so simple yet so eloquent a companion delighted me. There was a sort of tortuousness in his mind—but how pellucid was his speech ! Perhaps even so soon I was aware of a certain—I shall not call it ostentation—of a certain breathless anxiety in the matter of his erudition. Yet how rarely, I reflected, came the opportunity to him of quoting Horace on the path between Nocelle and Agerola !

'Agerola !' I repeated. 'But I was to find my way from Nocelle to quench my thirst there. And I am thirsty no longer. Where,' I wailed, feeling my pockets with feeble humour, 'where have I mislaid my thirst ?'

'It will turn up,' said the son-in-law, daintily apprehending my wit, 'it will turn up in one of your waistcoat-pockets by the time we arrive in Agerola.' I thought I had never met so percipient a son-in-law.

The scarlet-kerchiefed lady and her man stood at the threshold of their house.

'Thank you,' I said. 'Thank you. How, in fact, shall I ever thank you ?' (I had made manœuvres with my wallet, but the ferocity I had already celebrated in verse seemed so near asserting itself if I persisted, that I

half pretended I had thought the wallet, in my felicity, a handkerchief.)

'When you see Giuseppe in America,' said she, 'tell him he must write oftener. It is not right he should so forget his old mother!'

'Giuseppe was always her favourite,' explained the old man indulgently.

'Indeed,' I promised, 'I will take Giuseppe by the ear and make him write five pages then and there.'

'*Andiamo!*' said the son-in-law.

'*A rivederci, Signore!*'

'*A rivederci! Mille grazie!*'

Away into the open again out of the rosemary of Nocelle, its pigs, its butterflies. The sun was still high, the heat still puffed from the boulders at our feet. The caryatid, unstiffened into motion, went ahead of us, like that other beast of burden that had climbed out of Positano that morning.

'Did I perhaps mention that my friends have specially urged me to take luncheon (a very belated luncheon it will be) at a place called the Risorgimento in Agerola? They have very agreeable memories of its cooking,' I said to my companion.

'A more amiable hostelry than the Risorgimento it would be difficult to find in the whole peninsula. And there is—forgive the cliché—a *je ne sais quoi* about its cooking, as your friends doubtless discovered, which can be described only as . . . I am afraid it can only be described as a *je ne sais quoi*.'

I nodded my head sympathetically. It is not too easy to attain the finest shades of language on a baking mountain

path nearly perpendicular in places. I began to be aware that for a South Italian peasant he was doing extraordinarily well. When he left me that day, he would no doubt return to a dwelling which consisted of one flat-vaulted room. Its decorations would be a Madonna in a niche and a thirty-year-old photograph of a liner that once had fared between Naples and Buenos Ayres. The kitchen might be at an outer corner of the house, where the wall of the pigsty abutted upon it. The goat would doubtless occupy the same chamber as his master and mistress and the chickens. Most of the space would be filled by a large bed under which the potatoes were stored, and the manure dried in its season.

I nodded my head sympathetically. One function of my mind was very clearly aware that he spoke so opaque a dialect that if one ray of light out of fifty penetrated from his mind to mine, I was lucky. I had no conception that any dialect of any language could be so incredibly disrelated from it or that any human speech could be so supremely unintelligible. Another function of my mind understood every word he was saying just as effortlessly as a beaker holds the water that is poured into it. But I more than understood this dialect. I observed with pleasure that I spoke it quite consummately. I played with it, refined upon it. I expressed ideas in it for the sake of expressing them. I discussed Locke. He countered with Croce. I dissected our contemporary painters, Grant and Wyndham Lewis. He had at me with the merits of Felice Casaroti and Ubaldo Oppé but deprecated their excessive loyalty to Bronzino. Yet every now and again our conversation returned to the excellence

of the cooking at the Risorgimento, for I was becoming as hungry as I had been thirsty, and the theme interested me powerfully.

'You will find him particularly expert,' said the son-in-law, 'in the presentation of oysters. He arranges them daintily upon couches of crushed ice in a way which will infallibly bring Alphonse back into your mind.'

'Alphonse?' I inquired hazily. 'Which Alphonse?'

'But there is only one Alphonse,' he said, a little hurt. 'That recherché little restaurant in Paris, in the rue de l'Epée. Don't you remember? *Au vol-au-vent*, I think the name was. But people talked of it as a person, not a thing; they talked of going to "Alphonse," precisely because there was such a personal note about the cooking, a sort of delicious understanding *à deux* with Alphonse, or at most *à trois*.'

'Of course,' I hastened to explain. '*The* Alphonse.'

'And soup?' asked the son-in-law.

I leaned back against a rock reflectively. A young dull-brown lizard darted across my toe. He had no tail, and seemed ashamed of it.

'Do you know,' I said, 'I can hardly think of anything pleasanter than a *poule au pot* with . . .'

'With little crusts, of course, and . . .'

'A suspicion of grated cheese?'

My heart twitched forward hungrily. '*Avanti!*' I exclaimed. Impassive and magnificent the woman stalked ahead under her enormous sack of green-stuff. White sails lay on the sea like petals fallen from apple-blossom in an early summer wind.

'Sole, do you think?' I asked.

'*Poached* sole,' he was certain.

'I have a great fondness,' said I, 'for poached sole.'

We climbed onward and upward, descended now into a gully, rose out of it again on to the bare tops. What impression would I leave upon my friend's mind if I could not emancipate my own from this obsession of food?

'You find your bucolic occupation offer mind and body sufficient *pabulum*? Or do you find it necessary to supplement them with a little occasional music in Dresden, and pictures, now and again, in Vienna?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'What further company do I need, when the evenings are long, and my dear wife is engaged upon our humble supper of lentils or broad beans, than our friends Theocritus and Bion and Horace. Above all, Horace. I always learn an ode of Horace by heart while shaving. Let me commend the practice to you. But I have been wondering, sir, if you will permit the impertinence, I wonder upon what occupation you spend your own energies? Or am I too bold?'

'Not at all! Not at all!' I assured him. 'I?' I screwed my eyes tight and wondered. What, after all, *was* my occupation? A few moments of quiet commune with my soul followed. 'I shoot big game!' I said.

He looked at me.

'I thought so!' he said.

I bowed.

'Rhinoceros and tiger, that sort of thing! A man must do something to keep his virility alive in a jaded world. I am reputed to possess the most astonishing collection of tiger-tusks in the western suburbs of London.

All the virile clubs send out student-parties on Sunday mornings—the "Beefsteak," the "Savage," the "United Universities." Some day, perhaps, I might even do myself the pleasure——'

'It would be too charming.'

I warmed to my subject. 'The Viceroy of India, who has lately taken to the same diversion, pays me the compliment from time to time of exchanging trophies with me—an amiable little courtesy not infrequent among the major big-game hunters. Musquash,' I said, 'that is my speciality. Musquash.'

'Musquash?' he asked.

'Musquash!'

I have since frequently tried to recall the peninsula dialect word for 'musquash.' I remember that the beast engaged our attentions across a wood of windy pines through which we looked down towards Vettica and a turquoise sea. It seemed not impossible that a musquash might at any moment make its appearance from a thicket of saplings. I have spent fruitless hours trying to rediscover the peninsula dialect word for musquash. Neither the son-in-law nor I had any difficulty with it whatsoever.

We emerged into the open again. A group of peasants with burdens on their heads were half a mile in advance of us, moving flatly across the lifted sky like figures upon a cinematograph cunningly tinted by Giorgione and Correggio.

'Musquash?' asked the son-in-law. 'Is it good to eat?'

It was unfortunate. 'It does not figure,' I inquired apprehensively, 'on the menu at Agerola?'

'I have not heard so. But I think you can be certain of a neatly roasted pheasant.'

Interest in my approaching luncheon returned upon me again with the force of a piston.

'As for wines——' the man continued.

'*Hercule!*' I exclaimed, quoting from the classics. 'What sort of a cellar has the man got?'

'It pleases me,' he jested, 'to see you have found again the thirst you had mysteriously mislaid at Nocelle!'

I waved the reference aside. 'A white wine, obviously, with not much body. There was—if I do not sound disrespectful to the Nocelle vintage of your esteemed mother-in-law, which, I assure you, is my last intention. . .'

He bowed again. There was a gold flicker of broom about his knees. Overhead a hawk was circling.

'There was so much body, in the best sense of the word, about that Nocelle wine as to make it . . . almost carnal, shall I say? A perfect Rubens among wines!'

'I have more than once made precisely that observation to my dear parents-in-law. I think, to meet the present contingency, we need something a little more Cinquecento?'

I marvelled at the man's percipience.

'I am tempted,' he went on, 'to suggest a Pollaiuolo. Antonio, of course, I mean. But I rather think——'

'A little too astringent, almost?'

'Precisely. We want, I think, a certain fragility of bouquet combined, to put it frankly, with a sort of lusciousness in the grape itself. A painter whose actual basic substance is alluring, even fleshly, yet the atmosphere that bathes it shall redeem it from grossness. I would

have said Vicenzo Catena, excepting that he lacks, it seems to me, that earlier quality, the flesh, the sheer grape. Parmigiano has all the grape you need, but where, I ask you, is the bouquet? Wait, I think I 've got it. The painting, I mean; I can't recollect the painter. Surely, sir, you remember that charming Venus with Mars asleep, an oblong painting it is, in Berlin.'

'Of course,' I rushed in glibly. 'Botticelli!'

He looked at me sadly and not a little scornfully from under his uneven brows. I began to notice how uneven the brows were, and his finger-nails, perhaps——

'I was careful to specify Berlin. A much fleshlier Venus, surely. And the absurdest chubby little Cupid under her left breast, as it might be her own baby daughter. There could not be a picture more unlike the Botticelli you referred to, despite the superficial identity of theme. After all, both Simone Martini and Luca Giordano painted Madonnas.'

I bit my lip with shame, and with a sensation of rising temper. What right had the fellow to take me to task over a little slip which Berenson might have been guilty of. No, perhaps not Berenson. . . . I was beginning to dislike the fellow's bloated knuckles.

'Surely you recall that delicious large-eared white rabbit nuzzling at Cupid's fingers. And the little cherub in middle distance, playing on the meadow with Mars' helmet and greaves?'

'Piero del Cosimo!' I exclaimed suddenly.

'Of *course* that 's the name! How absurd of me! That is the sort of wine we are after, I think, eh? A Piero del Cosimo wine!'

I shook off my impatience with the fellow. He knew what wines were, anyhow. It was true he flaunted the Cinquecento a little offensively, as if he owned it. I was prepared to forgive him more than that.

'I shouldn't be surprised,' I hazarded, 'if it wasn't a Château Yquem we were after.'

'My dear sir,' he said cordially, 'I know as a positive fact that he has a dozen or two bottles laid down of that very 1904 vintage——'

'But that 's impossible!' I cried joyously.

'I assure you, 1904!' he insisted.

'Cooled a long age . . .' I gloated.

'I do not know,' he said with more than a touch of severity, 'if you belong to that school of gastronomes who maintain that red wines should be served boiling hot in saucepans and white wines should be presented in the form of icicles and then sucked.'

'I gave you no warrant . . .' I protested. My remark was interrupted by the sudden shelving of the path downward into a sort of cultivated scoop cut out from the wilderness. I looked down on the foam of a sea of cherry-blossom. As we descended upon it, our caryatid was engulfed by it suddenly. I felt sorry that I had allowed her somewhat pretentious husband to occupy the whole of my dialectic fluency all these hours among the tawny heights. It was evident we were approaching Agerola and the Risorgimento and luncheon and poached sole and Château Yquem. As we climbed out of the cherry-blossom, my resentment against the gentleman increased. Who ever had suggested boiling red wines in saucepans? Take the chill off a little, yes.

Why not? And who would *not* present a white wine snug in its ice-pail on such a day as this? Who but some arid doctrinaire who was ready to sacrifice even his palate to his dogma. I should see to it that the landlord of the Risorgimento did not, for any consideration, omit that ice-pail. At the top of the path the suspicion assailed me—for the fellow made a series of noises out of his stomach—that the fellow, if he might be a scholar, was certainly no gentleman.

We were on the top again. The path stretched straight before us to an institution which could be nothing other than the Risorgimento.

I looked with more reflective eyes upon my guide than I had hitherto employed that day. There was no doubt at all that he was a leering, shifty, ungainly fellow. There were the tracks of multi-coloured greases upon his tattered waistcoat and sleeves. He squinted. It was difficult to endure the discovery that he squinted. It was not the sort of squint that sometimes decorates the faces of the last effete scions of ancient and much-intermarried families. It was just a nasty common squint. If he was no gentleman (and the wine I had drunk in Nocelle had evidently deluded me into that belief) he might still be a scholar. I recalled vividly his delighted citations from Horace and more recently his familiarity with his ancestral painters. But we were rapidly approaching the Risorgimento, the exterior of which, I could not hide from myself, disappointed me acutely.

'We will not,' I began, in the leisurely senior-common-room manner which we had adopted all day, but remembering rather resentfully his sarcasm on the subject of my

oinosophia, 'we will not banter words with each other in the manner of your entertaining forbears, Battus and Corydon . . . you remember, of course?' Even as I spoke a desolating suspicion seized me that he did not remember.

'Eh?' he gaped, leering at me under his bad brows.

'Theocritus,' I mumbled without conviction, 'surely?' Yet earlier in the day he had shown a knowledge of the pastoral poets that had more than charmed me. He had been learnedly playful about Aeschines in the fourteenth idyl and the whole question of barbers' shops amongst the Thracians. 'The fourth idyl,' I insisted woefully. 'Don't you know? "Tell me, Corydon, whose kine be these"—and so on.'

Once more he made the noises to which I was forced recently to refer. I turned from him angrily and for some time not a word passed between us. It was at this stage, not earlier, that a hideous speculation seized me. How much of this fertile afternoon had been occupied by strict monologue? My companion assisted me to a solution of the problem. For suddenly (we were not many yards from the highly unpromising threshold of the Risorgimento—the whole place looked dirtier than any inn could look without trying to, hard) he burst into a spate of language. I have hitherto considered Magyar an unintelligible tongue and Czech and the Canton dialect of Chinese. But you might think these tongues flowed from those very Fountains of Lucidity wherein Miss Woolworth and I bathed so frequently in Capri, if you heard them alongside this turbid gibberish enunciated by the son-in-law.

And we had maintained all day so crystalline a dialogue. Strange, strange.

I apprehended, none the less, that I was to let him have fifty liras as honorary payment for the transport of my rucksack from Nocelle. It might have been my extreme indignation upon realizing the impudence of his request that annulled completely from my mind that mastery in the dialect of the Sorrentine peninsula which all that afternoon I had exulted in. I found myself capable of nothing but the most impeccable Italian—the syntax of Siena, the pronunciation of Rome.

'I 'll see you in Hell first!' I said.

It was evident he had not the faintest idea of what I had said. He turned his ear towards me and squinted like a criminal lunatic.

Then I repeated in terse English: 'I 'll see you in Hell first!'

He understood me perfectly.

'Make it five liras!' he whined, as I slipped the straps of the rucksack from his shoulders. (I found my sponge and razor missing later out of the left-hand pocket, and out of the right-hand pocket a small collection of picture-postcards illustrating the Last Judgment. I gloat to think of the nightmare that Hell according to Jerome Bosch must have plunged him in, and of the nightmare where he must still be wallowing if the shock of discovering the nature of his theft has not long since sent him sweating to a monastery as a lay brother. I am glad there was a Jerome Bosch or two in the collection. Think of those naked wretches he binds together on scorching trees with rusty pikes. And the nail-shod barrels he gives them to

occupy, with hideous bloated serpents yawning a fume of venom into their faces. And those demons all eye and tail, all beard and belly, all one foul distended nostril. And those cisterns of brimstone, those miserable revolving engines for mincing the damned, the perpetual jet of wine that spurts out of a barrel's bung-hole into the fixed-open mouth of a sot whose stomach swells and swells and swells, but it will never explode to give him ease. For Hell is capable of accommodating his bloated stomach if it swells for a million years. It will never explode. Altogether, it strikes me, a somewhat excessive punishment for over-indulgence in the grape. What if . . . But there is no object in entertaining a thought so phantasmal. And all the while the teetotallers and the nice people that do not lie, nor steal, nor lust, sit on the clouds, saying prayers and being comfortable. And the son-in-law beats his breast, and groans in the lunatic dialect of the Sorrentine peninsula, '*Peccavi! Peccavi! Peccavi!*')

But for the time being he confined himself to the request, 'Make it five!' At least I acted on the assumption that he did, and he spat into the roadway and slouched off. I entered the Risorgimento across a hearth-mat of potato-peel, and through a bead curtain of garlic odours. Even the garlic was extinguished a moment later, for the stove chose to celebrate my arrival by vomiting a puff of smoke like the funnel of an Atlantic liner. What fuel the Risorgimento of Agerola uses I cannot divine. The smoke was just as asphyxiating as charcoal fumes and just as gritty as the poorest South Staffordshire coal. Yet the smell of chlorine was not

lacking and the colour was rather a greyish yellow than a yellowish grey. Recovering from my spasm of coughing and wiping the acid tears out of my eyes, I wondered whether somewhere beyond the pall I was not looking towards the famous landlord of the Risorgimento. Substantial as the smoke had been, it had not wholly abated my hunger. There was a noise of sizzling somewhere, which I discovered later to be the landlord's wife sucking her teeth. But being unacquainted with the processes of poaching soles or basting pheasants and the sounds incidental to them, and unaware of the irritating lacunae in the landlord's wife's molars, it occurred to me that beyond that pillar of fire and cloud my own sole might be poaching, my own dear pheasant basting. It was true, I repeat, that I had found the outside of the house disappointing, but that was my own fault entirely. Nobody had even suggested that the architecture of the place had anything to commend it. The stress had been laid exclusively on the merits of the cooking. This business of the smoke displayed, after all, rather an excess than a deficiency of zeal. It was the sort of thing that might happen in the best regulated kitchen, excepting, perhaps, an electric kitchen. And what sort of personality would there be about the dishes turned out of an electric kitchen? At the most a chef might occasionally be electrocuted and turn up with the roast. But even he would taste a little synthetic, fabricated. Whatever was lacking from the cooking at the Risorgimento, it would be nothing if not idiosyncratic. I was, moreover, hungry, even yet.

So I lifted my voice gently and inquired, 'Do you think I might take a little *colazione*?'

There followed a shocked silence. The vapours were beginning to dissipate and the hosts and guests of the hostelry to be visible to each other again. A few shaggy men sat in the corners with a litre of wine before them. Now and again they spat. Now and again they did not spit. A bony young woman stood glaring at the fire. She swore at it. Her mother sat in a chair hard by, her hands folded over her dress. She had an astonishingly mobile jaw which pursued every ramification of her tongue about her teeth. I did not yet relate the sizzling with that process. No, not wholly yet had I abandoned my vision of oysters crushed in ice; not wholly yet abandoned my *poule au pot*, served with little crusts and a suspicion of grated cheese. Sole that shalt never flap thy poached fins in the frying-pans of Agerola (or saucepans, or whatever instrument be used for poaching you), pheasant whom subtile sauce and green salad delicate as rose petals shall never garnish, not yet had you passed like Eurydice into limbo from my finger-tips stretched out to you. So I lifted my voice again and asked:

'Would it be possible to take a little *colazione*? Anything you have on the day's menu?'

The silence was rather more formidable than before. The last whorl of yellow smoke uncurling revealed a gentleman who could be none other than the *padrone* of the Risorgimento himself, the chef to whom wines were more than women, and food more than God; to whom beef and pork were as kingdoms, veal and lamb as principalities. Cauliflowers and beans were as counties to him, condiments and spices as rich estates.

I have rarely seen so vague a gentleman. It was impossible to say where his hair began, or if he had any. If this particular lap of flesh were his chin, or two or three laps removed from his chin, was no deciding. Which his nose was or which his nose wasn't, it was ludicrous to determine. He had a sort of independent abdomen which swivelled on its own axis without relation to any movement of the rest of him.

'Would it be possible to take a little *colazione*?'

The abdomen swivelled inquiringly towards the large young woman who stood near the fire, holding a straw fan with a plain wooden handle. She had evidently fanned the vent-hole a little too industriously. She stared dangerously from the fire to her father.

'And what would the gentleman like?' she inquired, showing her teeth.

Either those others had been lying about the unparalleled cooking at the Risorgimento or they had not. Why should they so have lied? Perhaps the authorities here did not care to invite into their last culinary confidence any Tomaso, Ricardo and Enrico who staggered into Agerola. Nothing, on the other hand, venture, nothing win.

'A little roast pheasant!' I murmured.

The shaggy gentlemen in the corner went on with their wine. The hostess went on sizzling in a world of private contemplation. The *padrone* turned from me without interest. The fierce girl glared at the fire, as unaware of me as of the squashed fly against the wall behind me. A little maiden sat on a stool at the elder lady's knee, tormenting a cat that rolled impotently about

on her lap. The four legs drooped like four flags of surrender, the pale belly twitched apprehensively, but the beast had long ago given up the illusion that by running away she made the world's woe less. Now and again the little maiden might forget to screw the tail or pull out a hair. That was as much as might be hoped for. Once my long lean ancestors sloped through the oak-woods of Agerola, footing among the primroses. Not the wild winds were free and wild as they. Emerald among the tree-trunks burned at night their disembodied eyes. By day, flattened to a lizard's width, they crawled, hour beyond tense hour, upon eating-stuff juicy and screaming. What savouries they devoured of fledgling thrushes and nightingales in those watery hollows. Never a day but the feathers of fledglings adorned for trophies their royal primeval whiskers. A doom is upon us. The young of the female human hold in subjection the banners of our tails. They pull our whiskers even. Ichabod ! The glory is departed !

Only the little maiden with the cat did not remove her eyes from me. She was young enough to retain her interest in insanity. The others were bored with it. Perhaps that was the moment at which I realized that something or somebody was desperately wrong somewhere. Those others who had recommended me hither thought that the hunger and thirst of a wandering man were a fit object for their senseless japes, eh ? I would have the laugh of them yet. Agerola itself seemed to consist of precious little more than this pestilential hovel. Between me and Amalfi lay the wastes of San Lazzaro. Heaven knew that I had no force to tackle even a quarter of the

mountain without food, let alone wait till the long descent into Amalfi was accomplished. By all the gods I should eat and drink in Agerola, and both well.

'Is there a little meat in the house?' I addressed the *padrone*. He addressed his daughter.

'Since the cow died of a cancer,' she barked, 'there has been no meat in the house.'

'Let the *signore*,' rumbled the padrone resourcefully, 'have a little macaroni. Why should the gentleman not have a little macaroni?'

I would *not*, no, I would *not*, be content with macaroni. I breathed hard. I clenched my fists. I looked straight into the eyes of the formidable daughter.

'Cannot a little *biftek di maiale* be bought for me? I am more hungry than it is easy to say. I have walked the length of Italy this morning.'

'Ask *him*!' she motioned with her fan towards her father. 'I will cook it!' She was evidently not so flinty a young woman as she had seemed.

'*Signor padrone*——' I began. But the chins, noses and the rest were already in motion. They were gyrating towards the door. I sat down at a table triumphantly.

The wine, at all events, perhaps the wine bore some relation to the rumour that had gone before. Why should it not? I ordered a litre of the wine of Agerola. Bliss, to be moistening my parched throat again! I filled my mouth and emptied it speedily.

'Wine!' I said. 'I ordered wine!'

'What then?' demanded the fierce daughter. The stuff was evidently a decoction of stale apples and turnips. 'Did I say I wanted wine? I am sorry. I did not

make myself clear. I meant to indicate that if ever I drink wine, I fall into a madness and foam at the mouth. *Per favore*, a flask of water ! '

I sipped my water in the darkness and the smoke, meditating smoky thoughts. The *padrone* entered, bearing a large section of an ox with him. The daughter hugged it to her bosom, then deposited it in a frying-pan. The molar maternal sizzlings were supplemented by angrier noises. The daughter fanned fiercely at the oven, sending funeral vapours into the air. The shaggy peasants drank stolidly, and spat, and said not a word. *La belle dame sans merci* had them in thrall. And me. And the quartered ox. I waited, sipping my water. A grime like the first siftings upon Pompeii settled upon me. And the peasants. And the quartered ox. My luncheon was laid before me. I scraped the grime away, and the thickening grease. I carved at the red corpse below savagely. I carved for five minutes, and ten minutes, and lifted a clot of nerves to my lips. The *padrone* hovered about me, his eyes blinking anxiously. So did my own. I started the carving process again. I achieved another cellular clot.

' *Vi piace, signore ?* ' he said. ' Do you like it ? '

The peasants too, they were interested in my operations. The little maiden rose, flinging the cat from her knees, and sidled over to me. She thrust two fingers into the dish, then sucked them. She thrust her fingers in again, and I seized her wrist and tried to remove them. The fierce daughter glared balefully. Who was this malhandling her sister ? I scraped again and sawed and sawed and sawed.

'The meat is hard, eh, *signore*?' asked the *padrone* piteously. The fierce daughter was waiting for my reply.

'No, the meat is not hard,' I said, and sawed and sawed.

'I am sure it is hard!' he insisted.

'I never tasted softer meat,' I said, sawing.

'No, *signore*, I fear it is very hard meat, very hard.'

It became a matter of honour with me. The meat was softer than melted butter. 'Such soft meat it has never been my good fortune to taste.'

The peasants drank. I sawed.

'I am sure it *must* be hard . . .' he began. I was afraid that if he persisted in voicing his illusion, I would begin to think the meat hard myself.

'No, no! . . .' I was insisting.

But his amorphous little hands waved me aside. His abdomen was rotating gently. All his chins heaved.

'Because, you see, the animal was only killed this morning. How should it not be hard?'

I exgurgitated the contemporary mouthful. The nerves and tendons and ganglions on the plate before me assumed new significance. They twitched and strained, expanded and contracted. The bloody mass quivered as the live beast's did when the flies were biting.

I rose, green as grass.

'Did I say I wanted meat?' I stammered. 'I am sorry. I did not make myself clear. I meant to indicate that if ever I take meat, I start barking at the ceiling. An affliction of the uric acid. The bill, madam, you say? Certainly, as much as you like. I have enjoyed

my *colazione*, who can say how much. I shall always recommend my friends to the Risorgimento at Agerola as they have recommended me. . . .'

I adjusted the straps of my rucksack and tottered towards the door.

'Particularly the poached sole,' I said, 'more than anything else the poached sole!'

It was raining as I passed out into the late afternoon air. It was raining, thank God! Rain, and rain, and primroses in the copses of Agerola!

AGEROLA—AMALFI

I

IMMEDIATELY before my feet lay a valley country, whither, from the direction of the sun, I knew that I must plunge at once whatever mountains ensued between me and Amalfi. I lifted my face to the rain and let it stream down. I cupped my hands in it and drank it for lustration. A rainbow was arched over the northern hills. I descended through belts of chestnut and oak woods and looked for the growths I had become familiar with. Where had I been transported? Nowhere the *fichi d'India* proliferated over the ruin of their own dead leaves, from which, when weather or insects have devoured the harsh skin, a fibrous anatomy like a sponge emerges. Nowhere I beheld the fleshy leaves of mesembryanthemum nor the grey-green spikes of agave. What had happened to Mediterranean broom? Where rioted the rosemary of Capri?

The rocks! The rocks! Was I in a limestone country? The paths shelving through the hazel woods crumbled as I ran down them, and were brown-yellow like sands when I thrust in my stick to inquire what earth was this. The lines of the rocks were soft and rounded, not gem-keen like those I had clambered over all day. The whole quality of their shadows was subdued. Everywhere was a noise of running water, rivulets and freshets, when all these many days I had heard only the surge of the sea.

Why did all this seem so incredibly strange, so acutely familiar? These bird-songs, where had I heard them?

This smell of wet mould, where was it about me night and day? Apple-orchards, verily, apple-orchards—no more the dark-ribbed alien leaves of loquat. Where had I known all this? Hereford, under the Black Mountain, wet hollows in Devon, Dane Valley in Staffordshire. England, England! And cresses under a bridge, and primroses crowding away up the banks into the copses of hazel and alder! I told upon my fingers a tale of hedgeside flowers, such as keep company with you on the road from Chagford to Fenworthy, before the moorland begins, or under the hedges of Clare in Suffolk, or on the road from Delamere, when you set out for Frodsham and halt a mile from the estuary flats. Wild-brier, speedwell, crane's-bill, star of Bethlehem, ragged robin, celandine, wood-sorrel. Chrome catkins of hazel, silvery of willow. A blackbird darting through the briery undergrowth, a chaffinch talking on an alder bough, somewhere a hidden linnet, hard by a robin.

It is as if that mighty bastion of Monte Sant' Angelo (which now lay behind me—for I had passed under its southernmost spur at the point where my path led me above the village of Vettica) keeps the very spirit of this Agerola valley a thousand miles aloof from that radiant peninsula of Sorrento, quintessential Italy; as if between Sant' Angelo and the Punta di Campanella, Italy makes one glorious bid to be herself supremely, in the blue of the seas encompassing her, in the gold of the mountains constituting her, in the form and odour of the plants that are her garment. So that in this secluded valley of Agerola, Italy is not herself. Valley though it be, its height above sea-level gives it a character not its own,

the more so in that Sant' Angelo walls her from the west and the mountains above the Capo di Conca from the south. Even before the road from Agerola attains the smiling coast about Castellamare, it plunges through a long dank tunnel which there is no circumventing save along arduous paths by crevice and gully.

There were willow-warblers, I say, in the valley, and whitethroats. I almost looked to see some village of thatched houses and an ale-house with the rain dripping from the sign of the Goat and Compasses. Perhaps in the rectory at that moment the vicar was discussing next Sunday's bible classes with Mrs. Dalrymple, while his curate was not at all certain that Miss Dalrymple was not a very attractive young woman. The vicar's wife, without in the least spoiling the harmony of the little party, was making it quite evident to Sarah that you toast the crumpets on both sides, and please wait till the Dalrymples have gone, despite the servant problem.

The smell of mould was England, the smell of turf. Was that Sir Henry's second gardener (who added to his various other public occupations the position of secretary to the village cricket club) already eyeing the meadow with a business eye ; and though the new pitch was uncomfortably near the clump of willows, for fielding at cover it was obviously preferable to last season's pitch, where every wide had trickled into a gravel-pit.

I realized suddenly that the general drift of the valley was taking me miles northward out of my way, which now lay due eastward to Amalfi. I also realized that even if I met the Dalrymples issuing from the rectory garden they would not know half so much of the country

as the peasant-woman at that moment approaching me out of a field of beans. I put the question to her politely :

'Could you tell me the road to Amalfi, please ?'

The lady, strong as a lion in the hips, and dark in the skin as a chestnut, with purple eyes like myrtle-berries, planted her naked feet in the bean-furrows and rocked with laughter. Miss Dalrymple would under no consideration have behaved so rudely.

I repeated my question. She roared with laughter again. It was like the laughter of a horse ; she showed large yellow teeth not unlike a horse's. I felt myself strongly attracted to her, yet it did not seem she would help me very far on the road to Amalfi. She opened her mouth and spoke, and I understood hardly a word. . . . I recalled my prowess in dialect earlier that day, and determined that on this further side of Monte Sant' Angelo it underwent radical modifications. What was I selling ? So much, I gathered, she inquired. No, I was not selling anything. She planted both hands on her hips and laughed again, like a military band. So I was just wandering about idly, carrying all that *roba* on my back with no more intention of selling it than flying ? Exactly. How long had I left my home-country ? Eight or nine months. That was too much even for her sense of politeness. '*Che bugia !*' she trumpeted. 'What a lie !'

At this moment a company of peasants appeared, and she discharged at them exuberantly all the information she had gathered concerning me. They fingered my rucksack suspiciously.

'What, after all, was I selling?'

By the Blessed Virgin and all the saints, nothing! Which was the road to Amalfi?

They would not commit themselves. I was at a complete deadlock. Perhaps, if I produced my spare socks and shirts, and confessed that these were the wares I trafficked in, I might make myself a comprehensible object to them? But suppose it occurred to them to buy my wares? I dug my heel into the ground and stared. We stared at each other.

At this moment another lady appeared and took the situation in hand. She spoke a very intelligible Italian, having once been a laundress in Naples. Was I a German painter, she asked. Well, if this was the sort of category that did not perplex her, I had no objection to being a German painter. She had once been a model to a German painter. She looked at me coyly under her eyelids. I had no objection to using her as my model. Perhaps, when I returned from Amalfi, she would allow me the privilege of painting her? She twisted her mouth prettily.

'As for that *animale* there'—she made a contemptuous gesture towards the laughing lady—'all she's fit for is to scrape the earth for potatoes!'

'Not at all,' I objected politely.

She detached me from the company. 'The path to Amalfi goes up through that wood there. Then back to the left again up the hillside, and you come out on to the road to Agerola from Gragnano.'

'But I have just descended from Agerola, I have just had *colazione* at the Risorgimento!'

She smiled patiently. These poor German painters must be humoured. 'No,' she said quietly, 'you come out immediately under the Risorgimento! Then you go forward along the village, and anybody will tell you where the steps descend upon the Amalfi road.'

I left her, having paid an advance upon her professional services as a model. I set my jaw firmly, throwing my mind back upon that preposterous son-in-law. At what foul anonymous hostelry had he delivered me? What miserable hamlet had he led me to, pretending we had attained the goodly village of Agerola? I scaled the belts of oak and chestnut woods again and heard everywhere the voice of hurrying waters. I attained the road at the summit and Agerola was about me, her broad-eaved roofs, like the roofs of Alpine villages, telling of the snow-storms that rage here in winter and the wolves from the fastnesses of Monte Sant' Angelo. All was sunlight now and spring. The clouds had been combed to shreds among the peaks and wound sinuously and brightly through them like snakes. Out of the ashes of my illusion rose the veritable Risorgimento not many yards away; and if I did not pause to examine whether the wine there was Château Yquem, 1904, or if *poule au pot* and poached soles were on that evening's menu, it was not only because I was certain that no French frippery would find its place there (it being enough for them if they made such a dish of lentils as Esau sold his birthright for and *polpette* worthy of Sylvia's own), but for the reason that I still retained a furtive consciousness of the charred carcase I had earlier attempted to devour. I attained the thousand steps cut into the mountain-side that hangs

steeply over the Amalfi road. The very moment upon which I once more attained the southern prospect the sensation of England ceased, confined to that pocket of watery land thrust under the rampart of Sant' Angelo, with her hazels and alders, her apple-orchards, linnet and wren, celandine, crane's-bill, speedwell, blackthorn, sloe.

II

I had left the rain behind me in England. Once more upon the vine-terraces burned down, though long declined from the meridian, the unmitigated sun. Once more the sensation returned that first came to me months ago by the Lake of Garda, upon entering Italy : that though earth might crown herself with a foolscap of night, yet, if you but hallooed loud enough, you would tear its flimsy texture and sunlight would come ripping through. Sunlight ceased to be a planetary circumstance ; it was a quality inherent in the very air. The buds of the fig-trees were swollen with it, each vine-leaf uncurling delivered a fragment of it that had been held captive. The dawn conveyed no element of hope because sunset was bound up with no melancholy. Night itself seemed a modification of noon, and moonlight a silken robe wherein the sun paid court to his starry loves.

So that, having descended the mountain steps and rounded bay and promontory in blue and golden succession for I know not how long, when I at length had turned the flank of the last headland, and in one moment saw before me the whole grief of Cristo Morto pageanted along the water-front of Amalfi, I could feel no grief. It is not that I am not susceptible to the emotions of

ceremonies alien to my heathen heart. Had I not felt a bursting of bonds when the guns boomed and all the minarets were ablaze at the conclusion of Rámadán? I remember well how after a service at a chapel on the Welsh moors I knew that Christ dead could never have been Christ living. Here, for all the elaboration of sorrow, I was certain that Christ living never became Christ dead.

So this day was Good Friday? How should I have known it among the pagan mountain-tops? Once all day I had wandered in the narrow streets of an eastern town, and at the day's end, finding myself in a dark alley full of lamentation, a single lantern burning, and one voice intoning the antique sorrow of my race, I became suddenly and for the first time aware that this was an anniversary that had bound all my years with iron and cast its shadow broadly behind and before.

This was Good Friday. No atom of its significance should not be rendered into concrete shape. What more gracious setting for the procession could have been devised? Or was it not so gracious that if the mind was saddened, the soul could not be? Smoothly the waters lipped the sands and the sands themselves seemed to draw forward for so cool an embrace. Beyond the white houses, pricked out with belfry and coloured dome, climbed the steep cliffs. The cliffs swung out against a violet sky. The sky swung downwards again to define a violet sea. Smoothly the waters lipped the sands. It was an unbroken circle of serene beauty save where, across the yellow line of sands which were its diameter, moved the simulacrum of the corpse of Christ.

First came a body of hooded and cassocked men, looking out through narrow slits. They bore a cross which in turn bore a towel, and, tacked upon the towel, an oleograph of St. Veronica's handkerchief. Six lamps followed them, and further hooded men and boys. About the brows of all these twined a crown of thorns. Acolytes followed, vestured in the black and purple of mourning. Behind them came the chanting priests. Here at length, borne by the worthies of Amalfi in their most sedate Sunday costume, ensued a vast gilded catafalque. Four cherubs at each corner wept uncontrollably. The pallor of Christ's face was the more piteous in that his painted blood was so profuse and shrill. A weeping Madonna followed him, clad in black and gold. She held a cambric handkerchief to her eyes whence started tears of moulded wax. Behind all this a band blared, ecstatic in the ferocity of its threnodies. And then the crowd for whom all this dolorous pomp was urged—old men and women, married folk with their families, youths and their sweethearts, an odd forlorn child wailing in the bedraggled rear of the procession with none to hold its hand.

But I could not believe it in the germinating air, against the tideless sea that knew not even the brief death of tides. No, nor against the bursting immortality of grove and garden. Not against this sun which, setting, did not yet seem to withdraw itself from the atmosphere, but inhere potent within each blade of grass, every grain of sand, every drop of sea. The sun was not setting, if the sun ever had risen. If Christ had been born, he was not dead. There was no death.

No, not though the master of the hooded fraternity

that had in hand the organization of the procession, not though he gave orders dementedly like a stage-manager rushing out from the wings during a performance. There was a rope about his neck and it swung wildly in the air behind him as he requested them now to lift the handkerchief of Veronica higher, now to cease swinging their hoods aside in order that they might spit. It seemed as if he were afraid that the secret might be known : Christ was not dead, Christ was not dead. He darted forward, straightening a crown of thorns, or thwacking some youngster over the head for saluting his friend in the crowd. More and more robustly the priests chanted, as if their robustness might slay their Lord. Had not they, they and none other, alone the secret of his resurrection? But not even for the space of so few hours would Christ consent to die. He had eluded them. With sea and mountains, with stars and wind, he would not cease. When the buds broke and out of their jagged wounds surged the flame of flower, he would be more exultant than before, with the blossom of tiny things underfoot, with the blossom of tossing lakes of almond and peach and pear. But even in the vigour of winter he was not dead, as the sun was not dead at most intense night.

Not though the worthies of Amalfi lift more peremptorily above the unhallucinated crowd the manifest token of Christ's death. See, and believe ! But they did not believe. No, that was not Mary's true image that followed, but a garbed myth, a fabrication of these ponderous men that would slay him to exercise their privilege of exhumation. How shall Mary lament the seas that do not wane nor the stars that are not extin-

guished ? And this image of all images how shall Mary recognize ? See what anxiety there is in all that black emphasis ! Who shall know more surely than she that this image of Cristo Morto is an image neither of Christ nor Death ?

What, do the old women screw up their eyes and weep even as that funeral doll ? And an old man here and there ? It is their eyes that weep, not their souls. Those others, those priests, have tried so long to assure them their Lord died, century beyond century. Perhaps they believe it now at length, being old. Their blood does not sprout now in spring, putting forth flowers in the brightness of eyes, in the redness of lips. But behold the youths and the young women, the messages that pass between them whether they will or no. They are bound together by viewless tendrils, more unbreakable than the vine's tendrils on the terraces above their heads ; and out of a deeper core of earth does their vine draw sustenance.

The Christless catafalque returns from the deposition. The instruments and the lights pass homeward together along the sands. They disperse into the dark streets under the cliffs. Hour succeeds hour and the moonlight makes the houses alabaster and the cliffs translucent marble. The moon on the sea is a wilderness of hawthorn blossom. But this alabaster and this marble are the sun, and this hawthorn blossom. And my own heart is the sun, beating, beating.

He shall not ever be silent there.

III

I have not known, and shall never know, a day so lyric as this that followed, in Amalfi under the morning sun, in Ravello at noon, and at evening in a fantastic country where a brass moon and a bronze moon fought for mastery with a lamentable consequence which shall be made plain. It was a day when all thoughts, all passions, all delights, whatever stirred my mortal frame, were rendered into verses without any intermediary process. It was a day upon which I could no more eliminate rhyme and measure from my utterance than I could request my blood to cease flowing. Whether or no my Italian speech comported itself into *terza rima* I cannot now decide. If it did, it occurs to me that this is an explanation as valid as any other that has presented itself to me for the embarrassing behaviour of the *padrone* at the restaurant where I dined that night. But I must not anticipate him, nor the tourney of the two moons.

I forget. Once only, many years ago, came this uncerebrated, half-hypnotic lyric mood. I was travelling by the midnight train into the north country from London and was acutely uncomfortable all night, for I had neither a corner-seat nor an inch of space on the seat opposite to rest my limbs. The woman who sat next to me bared her breast too frequently to a sickly baby. The woman who sat over against her, a rather faded spinster, thought the exhibition intolerable in mixed company. To the first an open window was anathema. To the second a closed window was anathema. A stout gentleman beside me suffered from catarrh. A little

girl wiped her boots on me all night. Yet not for a moment did the hoofs of the lyric horses slacken from my brain. All the end-pages of all the books I had with me were scored over by a sprawl of verses. Ladies leaned from moonlitten towers. A cuckoo winged against a vast concave of moors, crying 'Life!' crying 'Death!' with hollow unemphatic alternation. There was a certain one . . . my lovely mistress, my white desire. . . .

Where she shall put
Her fair white foot,
Where once grew a weed a flower shall grow.
If she walk my heart
Shall fountains start
Where pools were only that could not flow. . . .

What jejune verses they were for the most part, I cannot recall. There is no interest in them, and little in the Salernitan verses I shall put down, saving that they were a simultaneous, even an anticipatory, record of events which else would have taken their place in the prose of this narrative. Yet despite all the vast differences of accident between these two moods, they were the same mood. I cannot disentangle it. Was the first a wild beating of the wings to escape? The second, surely, was an effort to imprison myself among these blossoms and vines for ever. *Then* my nostrils smarted with the stink of smoke in the tunnels. *Now* the odour of thyme and myrtle was about me. Yet the same function operated in each nerve and vein, and abstracted them from my control. I was the day's servant, not its master, as

I was then the night's servant. Would I could have served them better.

But when even my breakfast at the Albergo di Luna in Amalfi initiated the riot, what escape was there, and a breakfast of boiled eggs? Is there any especial quality about the hens of the Albergo di Luna that invests the eggs they lay with the potency of verses? I have no doubt that if I, for my part, laid eggs in such cloisters as the Luna's under such graceful arches supported by pillars so slim, inspired by amphoras so fairly designed and disposed so cunningly between Judas-trees and oleander, I too should lay no mean egg. Yet had the eggs been a preserve of rose-leaves, or a liqueur distilled from violets, I had protested in the same language to the waiter who served me with one or the other :

There is no other speech for me than verses,
These days of blue and rose.
Prose at my knees lies begging for my mercies.
I have no mood for prose.

Is not the sea all night and day about me,
Do not the hawks cry Hail?
The caverns and the peaks, do they not shout me,
If once my verses fail.

Nothing grows that like a poem springs not
Out of earth's dreaming brain.
No word I utter but to my own mouth sings not,
Like a lark to its nest again.

The piazza was full of amiable animation, but more than amiable. It was keen, intense. There was a

twittering from mouth to mouth of *Buona Pasqua!* like a noise of migrant birds arrived in the glades they have dreamed of all winter, the glades whence they have allowed themselves to be withheld too long. The very dome of the cathedral, glancing with its glazed bricks of green and gold, seemed a nest high-hung over the little town where at dusk there would be a last scuffling among the rosy clouds and a folding of wings.

As I climbed the winding road beyond Atrani that skirts the ravine under Ravello, I was aware that this spring-time poignancy which I had just seen manifest in the piazza below, in the quick flutterings of children, the excited voices of old men, a darting into arcades and out again of young men brilliant in new plumage, sudden trills of disembodied song—I was aware that this same poignancy rose this morning with the sap of every green thing in all those climbing wildernesses that assaulted, slope beyond slope, the far mountain peaks. The trunks of the olives did not now seem contorted with ancient sorrow, as is their wont. They seemed racked with the urgency of their exultation. Every leaf was sharp-pointed with it. The grasses hummed with it. The buds on the fig-trees, which were not yet ripe for bursting, took matters into their own hands, and exploded into green flame. There was a smoke to the burning of the lemons and oranges, as if they flared and there was none to trim their lamps. Arrow beyond arrow into the populous air urged oak and mulberry, stone-pine and cypress. I knew now what was the martyrdom to which St. Sebastian had been subjected, against what arrowy discharge his brow was so calm, yet so much

ecstasy had played upon his lips. Arrow beyond arrow of beauty urged into the twanging spring-time air.

And at this moment, out of my heart's depths, rose a sadness not to be borne, and a sense of my little worthiness so profound that I knew not where to turn my eyes. I, and none other, of my mourning line, to be chosen for this apocalypse, to learn verily what spring is, and what are sea and sky? Another arrow, piercing deeper than these others, not in the same wise feathered and making a sombre music as it flew, quivered, biting my flesh.

Is it because of some dear grace
That my dead fathers earned for me,
I meet the south sun face to face
And drink her brimming sea?

Oh you were scourged at the stake; the cross
Held out your arms to the crude sky
That I should glean out of your loss
A so sweet harvestry.

Yours the chaff and mine the corn,
O fruitless harvesters.
Forgive my dead and my unborn,
These joys and those your tears.

There are no present benisons
Not bought with tears wept by dead men;
Nor such as fail in our sons' sons
To bring forth tears again.

It may have been the noise of a bud bursting its sheath

that startled me out of this mood of rhythmo-fatalism. My arrival at the piazza of Ravello postponed it indefinitely, for a legend over the front window of the café at the corner filled me with dire apprehension. 'The old original refreshment room,' I read. 'Tea, coffee, cocoa, always ready.' It was most considerate of the Norman founders of Ravello so to have ministered to the wants of travellers from Ipswich and Cleveland, Ohio, and to disembarrass these last of any temptation to transgress against the anti-alcoholic prejudices of their country. But the 'old original'? Surely the beverages must be a little stagnant by now? A monument at the centre of the piazza displayed this same anxiety for old originality. It was a studiously broken pillar decorated with star and shield, which the Ravalesi had devoted to Umberto, good king and magnanimous, in 1904. It was notable how incomparably newer the pillar seemed in its anxious simulation of antiquity than any complete complacent block anywhere in Rome. What, has Paestum (that has presented ribs from its side to every church for leagues around) no more columns left, that the poor Ravalesi must set up this reject from a mason's yard?

The mosaic pulpit of the cathedral was the achievement of a richer comic genius. Such birds as you saw put together out of gold and blue, green and scarlet! Scraggy dodos and drunken pelicans, petulant parrots with beaks of malachite, a long-snouted secretary-bird that drank from a ruby fountain. In the ambo opposite, the whale was swallowing Jonah, and it was hard to say who liked it more. No rational person could have objected to being swallowed by so decorative a whale,

with its alternate scales of green and gold, with a blue line in the wing-feathers—or were they not fins ?

At the Albergo Palumbo, where a certain episcopal wine is served such as the critics term 'blonde and insinuating,' the inertia of rhyme seized me again. It may have been the *cameriera*, but though she was dusky as the black peony or the black poppy of the poem, she was not slim. No, she was not slim. There was, on the other hand, a certain slim lady at the corner of the terrace who ate her lunch with a curious formal delicacy that ravished me. Yet she was not dark. Her face was like lily petals with the sun shining through them. She rose and came towards me and passed beyond me into the hotel at the moment that the dusky *cameriera* was summoned from my sight by a florid Swiss waiter. And in the following manner I addressed my nuts and mandarins, whilst the two women added themselves in my mind each to the other, and divided the result by two :

She is a black peony or a black poppy,
Some scarlet flower I cannot name.
And a hooded wizard came.
He changed the flower into black flame.

No, not a flower but a tree . . . a willow . . .
Larch . . . a bush of flaming furze. . . .
Every grace of all is hers.
She shakes her boughs though no wind stirs.

No wind stirs but her own body
To its own secret music sways.
Behind her lids her shut eyes gaze
Down her dark blood's coral ways.

Do not look too long upon her.
Ask not what she sees and hears.
Not the pale Cumaean seers
Knew her spells of woes and fears.

Once there was a foolish poet
Asked her what these secrets be.
If you would not end as he,
Call the gods on bended knee.

I am not at all certain that it was not my intention to give the reader at least an inkling of these secrets. I was beginning to feel an apprehension of them coursing through my brain. But the slim lady returned for her vest-pocket camera. I sallied forth into the open, the current of my verses not so much dammed, even by the vest-pocket camera, as diverted into a fresh metric channel. I made my way round the head of the ravine towards the village of Scala, muttering (it is fortunate that my memory has retained few of the loose straws of song that the flood deposited all day about its banks) words like these :

Swing the willow catkins till they blow
Noon blind with golden snow.

Tease the deft lizards till they wonder were
You a hawk or trembling air.

Watch the slow fig, even the tardy oak
Puff into leafy smoke.

Then make a casque and cuirass out of the
Bronze of the carob-tree.

For stalwart plume upon your helmet wear
A bush of juniper.

Then seek out winter skulking in his den.
He 'll not come forth again.

Save like St. George's dragon that lay mute
Fawning at the saint's boot,

When he came forth armed cap-à-pie with Spring
To clip that naughty wing.

There is a princess also to be got.
To arms! Linger not!

That was the way it went. And I should have sauntered on indifferently into hendecasyllables, had I not heard a casual boy of twelve address me. '*Quando ti sposi?* When dost thou marry thyself?' Though I was not at the moment conscious of any particular understanding of that nature, the inquiry stopped me short. If, in my present condition, I had made no more than one proposal of marriage, I was lucky. Had it been the dusky waitress or the slim lady with the pocket camera? It occurred to me that I had put down the black peony-black poppy verses on the hotel menu. What document more incriminating? Hotel menu? Why, I recalled a cloak-room ticket that an attendant had given me in a fashionable restaurant in Dresden, at a time when paper was so scarce in Germany because so much of it was being converted into marks, and even cloak-room tickets were used twenty times over. 'Will you stay with me three weeks?' I read upon this damning ticket. The script was male, tortuous and Gothic. Immediately below, diffident and female, was inscribed, 'With pleasure.' The script was English—cathedral city I should think.

There was the German gentleman at one small table, opposite him his watery-eyed, tow-haired wife. Immediately behind his chair, at another small table, sat the English lady. Facing her that hectoring sanctimonious bully of a husband, a prebendary or a canon minor. The German couple had come in later than the English by the time required for the consumption of hors-d'œuvre and fish. These tow-haired females take three times as long to dress as decent women, and look like a hayrick when it 's finished. They had gone to the single empty table, the small one in the corner. She had looked up, the timid lady, with the large hazel eyes a little misted over. Their eyes met. All the abysses were gulfed. They understood each other more than their mothers ever understood them. Back to back they sat. Who could have believed that so complex a conversation can be carried on by projections and declinations of the shoulder-blades? But that is not specific enough. He fumbles for his cloak-room ticket—nothing else would be unostentatious enough!

'Will you stay with me three weeks?'

'With pleasure.'

And if all this can be deduced with such scientific precision from nine pencilled words on a cloak-room ticket, what might not be concluded from a set of verses on a hotel menu? 'Every grace of all is hers,' I recalled with dismay. 'No wind stirs but her own body.' How can you mention a lady's body without intentions upon it? Yet was it the slim lady or the dusky waitress who had picked up the menu first? That was a matter of the first importance.

I turned anxiously towards the small boy. 'If you could tell me, perhaps, whether it was——'

But I had completely misread the situation. I no more existed for him than negro sculpture. He had addressed a creature standing at the entrance to a vineyard, who was so completely obscured by the loads of broom and lentisk she was carrying, that I had imagined her to be a vegetable deposit. She slipped her loads from her head and the snub-nosed face of a young lady, aged about eighteen, appeared.

'*Quando ti sposi?*'

She pursed up her tiny eyes and attempted a sum in mental arithmetic. It was evidently too much for her. Then she brought her right hand forward contemplatively, and ticked the fingers off with her left.

'*Ogg' Sabat'. Doman' Domenig'. Dopodoman', lunedi. Ah, tre giorn'!*'

On the third day, the day after to-morrow, she would marry herself. The girl gave no sense at all that the day was to be a signal event in her life. You might have gathered marriage to be a bi-weekly episode with her. Her life will continue precisely as it has continued for who knows how long. There will be no change, however intimate, of any sort, excepting that she and her man will sleep under one roof the whole of the night. And another Longfellow will sing, dear fellow :

O the inexorable Fate
That dooms them to this life of toil.

The episode took place under a wayside shrine bearing a fresco in its lunette. Two hooded gentlemen, like

their kinsmen yesterday in Amalfi, looked through their eye-slits upon the souls of the damned. (That 's what comes through not paying your subscription to the Buffaloes or the Elks or whatever your friendly society be.) Above them in heaven, two cherubs smirked on both sides of a monstrance. The shrine bore the number, 64. 64, Scala ? 64, Amalfi ? 64, Italy ? 64 years of plenary indulgence ?

Not even the priest in the tumble-down basilica of the Santissima Annunziata in the hamlet called Minuto could tell me.

' 64 what ? ' I asked deferentially. The priest, a little pock-marked man but evidently a scholar, carried about with him an air of ample informativeness. His information must have had time to mature in that concealed and tangled village of Minuto, since the last visitor insisted upon being shown the antique marble columns and capitals in his church and its preserved crypt so thrillingly described as ' dangerous ' in the guides.

' 64 what ? '

' *In somma,*' he said expansively. ' In a word, number 64 ! '

' Oh ! ' I whistled. ' I see it all now ! '

I felt it was up to me to make the most of such an opportunity for recondite instruction.

' These pillars,' I said, ' how beautifully proportioned they are ! '

' Did you notice,' he said, ' how beautifully proportioned these pillars are ? '

' I wonder if you could tell me from what pagan temples they came ? '

'They might be described, you see in a word, as pillars. Pillars, *in somma*, that is how you would describe them!'

I thrilled at the news. Excitedly I followed him into the crypt. It is not often that you have so lavishly heaped before you the treasures of so rich a mind. We stood reverently before a thirteenth-century fresco of *La Nascita*. On the surface I thought it a rather dull piece of work, even incompetent. But I looked to my friend, the *parroco*, to draw out the more subtle qualities that had eluded me.

'*La Nascita!*' he said.

I had already deduced as much.

'The birth of Our Lord!' he supplemented.

'Yes?' I quivered.

'Here you will see His holy mother, the Virgin Mary!'

'No?'

'Yes!'

'But tell me, this saint here! The mould has eaten away the symbol by which we might have identified him. I wonder which saint it might be!'

'*In somma*,' he cried exultantly, '*un santo!*'

'No?'

'Yes!'

We climbed out of the crypt. My head buzzed like a hive full of honey.

'*Un santo?*' I repeated incredulously.

He smiled at me—a cultured and benignant smile.

'*Un santo!*' Simply. No more than that.

He walked a few yards on my road with me, then held forth his hand.

'*Addio, signore.* I must get back to my books.'

'*Addio, reverendo, e a rivederla*,' I hoped humbly.

IV

I walked on through an undergrowth of cistus and juniper. Now and again arbutus lifted its pink stalks like the feet of pigeons. Broom burst into casual flame. Spurge billowed heavily along the slopes. I paused before a tangle of paths that all sloped precipitously down from my feet. Which, if any at all, led down to Amalfi ?

I stood and ruminated. A loose-stone enclosure was at my left hand, too high for me to look over it. A squealing of pigs asserted itself. There followed immediately a squealing of children.

'*Ubi porci, ibi homines !*' I quoted. Or perhaps I invented it. But at that moment a colossal peasant made his appearance at a hole in the wall, evidently the state entrance to his property. He bore a brown baby on each arm.

'*Potete insegnarmi,*' I inquired, '*la strada per Amalfi ?*'

Even as the question left my lips I was conscious that I used too late and sophisticated a language to address him in. There was something primordial about his carriage ; the children lay in the hollow of his enormous arms like the young of a gorilla. Such as he it was who erected the cyclopean masonry that bluntly still affronts the day throughout the length of the peninsula. He had a low forehead, a huge chin, and tiny ears almost invisible in his long brittle hair. The eyes were bright and quick.

They regarded me. They pondered me as a gorilla might in the woods, when he encounters a beast whom he knows not whether to ravage or to enter with him upon a pact of reciprocal regard. Then he boomed grandly :

'Crikey, mate! 'Tain't so orften we gits one o' the lads o' the village dahn in these 'ere parts! 'Ow 's the Owld Kent Rowd?'

You do not hear more impeccable Cockney in the thoroughfare he referred to. I started back for a moment more perturbed than if he had behaved in the megalithic manner I had half anticipated. It was not his imputation that I was more familiar with the Old Kent Road than with Grosvenor Square, which, had we met in Cricklewood, I might have resented. But it is frightening to find a wall of cyclopean boulders tumbling of a sudden about your ears. At the mention of the Old Kent Road a dimness had fallen upon his eyes, the lines of his simian chin softened. Clearly my duty lay in that precise direction.

'Crikey!' I was forced to repeat. (I could at the moment recall no other gambit to a Cockney conversation.) I said 'Crikey!' once again helplessly, but he came forward and seized my hand and tugged it with fervour. The babies had slithered from his arms like tiny arboreal monsters. They clung to the inner sides of the columns which were their father's legs. They stared up at me from under eyebrows which would one day impend as shaggily as his.

'Come in and be matey,' he cried, 'and 'ave a spot er booze!'

We entered the *cortile*. No, there are no such things in the farms that line the Old Kent Road. We entered the yard and footed through a jungle of small brown pigs and small brown children. It was not easy to distinguish between them. Three large pink sows wallowed in the opulence of their maternity.

'Likely bunch er nippers!' he glowed. His commendation did not exclude the porkers. It dwelt upon them even. But it was only the children who had the smouldering tiger-tawny eyes. That would be, I assured myself, the way to distinguish them.

We entered his house. His father had owned it before him, and his grandfather and his great-grandfather, all the way back to those first megalithic forbears. Each of them had spent his boyhood in the Old Kent Road. There were two rooms in all, both vast as council-chambers. Round the walls of the first were ranged two or more series of great tuns. They protruded into the general darkness like the unnumbered squat reflective gods of Angkor temples. Out of the ceiling were suspended blood-red grooves of salame, that hung like trailers in a tropic forest; or like mottled snakes rather, who have coiled half their length about a branch and the rest swings limp in the windless dusk. The further room consisted almost entirely of a bed. Hither, after being extricated from the small brown pigs, the small brown children were mobilized and the family of Vincenzo Stenaio—this was my friend's name—disposed itself into its patriarchal slumbers. A terrace ran before the length of the two rooms, commanding a temple so superb of mountain, gulf and sky that I almost fell to my knees upon the sun-thrilled stone.

'Where 's that missus er mine?' he inquired. Signora Stenaio seemed to divine her lord's need of her, for in a few moments she stood by our side.

'A likely bitch!' he said. I applauded the spirit more than the letter of his observation. 'Another one 's

coming ! ' he said. So I had already concluded. I have not seen a peasant woman in Italy concerning whom the remark was not applicable. ' There 's only ten on 'em ! ' he explained, ' and there 's all this land to tackle, straight as fer as yer can see to them pointed trees—'ow do yer call 'em, nah ? '

' Cypresses ! '

' Same like in Eyetalian ! And the way these labourers come it acrorst yer these days, yer 've got to 'ev a femly. Straight, you 'ev ! '

Only ten children ? It was difficult to believe it. They ran on to the terrace, limped, crawled, rolled. They clung about our legs and the legs of the chairs and table brought in by their mother like little jelly-monsters. Then they detached themselves and drew up in files to contemplate the stranger. More children and more appeared. You might have thought the ranks were mustering for a new Children's Crusade.

The lady had placed before each of us a glass and litre-flask of wine.

' Sorry, matey,' said Vincenzo, ' that I ain't got no Worthington on tap. But there 's no flies on this stuff, neether ! '

' That,' I assented cordially, filling my glass again, ' there ain't ! ' I felt somehow that I would be guilty of gross discourtesy if I did not attempt to maintain the conversation in this idiom of the Old Kent Road. I could not recall, at the moment, the name of any public-house in that avenue. I hazarded a Crown and Anchor.

' Reminds yer o' the good old times,' I said, ' at the Crown and Anchor, matey, down't it ? '

He beamed. My shaft struck home.

'Yer remember that saucy old barmaid they kept there?' he wondered. 'Liz 'er name was, hi? I wonder wot 's 'appened to 'er!' Time had been annihilated for Vincenzo. He might have left those regions yesterday.

'I think a bloke called 'Awkins spliced 'er,' I suggested. 'They keep a pub in Dalston, larst I 'eard of 'em!'

'That 'll be gettin' on for fifteen years ago,' he mused, after a silence of two or three minutes. Something had restored his sense of time to him. It might have been the child who crawled up on to his knee. 'Fifteen blinkin' years! I wonder if it 's the same old Liz wot I used to know?'

'In course,' I asserted strenuously. 'They never 'ad but one Liz at the Crown and Anchor. 'Awkins said they never 'ad but one Liz in the 'Ome Counties!'

He filled his glass. I filled mine.

'I sometimes wishes,' he said, 'I was back again with my old barrer in them there parts! Them was times, them was!' He made a tired gesture towards his cascade of vineyards. There was a note of satiety in his voice, the weariness of one for whom nothing is left to hope for. Year beyond year the pruning of the vines, the spraying, the gathering, the pressing. Year beyond year one brown child, and another, and another. What dusky adventures had he encountered on his rounds between Brixton and Bermondsey! What pert Cockney wenches had been subdued in the shadow of those huge limbs! Now and again he had made pilgrimages to those incredible western lands—Shaftesbury Avenue, Piccadilly. Perhaps even, when the Lord Mayor's procession staggered

down the Strand, he stood, trembling with delight, among the jaded Londoners, overtopping their tallest like a poplar among hazels.

Afraid of getting sentimental we filled each other's glasses to fortify our virility. Signora Stenaio had already replenished our litre-flasks once—or twice, was it? More and more radiant for me the actual landscape became, for him more and more radiant the imagined. The Children's Crusade launched upon practice manœuvres. I saw the sallow faces of the Saracen peep out from the olive-roots.

For the fifth time we drank for the last time to the health of the Old Kent Road. Then we settled down again and discussed its virtues as if they had not occurred to us before.

Dusk was descending upon the singing world. We were—were we not?—passing through the room which consisted of a single bed. Here might Zeus have lain, Semele in his arms, to beget Dionysus. They alleged his birth to Thrace? I would not have a word of it. The homestead of Vincenzo Stenaio by Minuto above the mountains of Amalfi, in no place else. The ironwork of the bedposts curled into acanthus and ivy. Implicate frequently in the delicate tracery were a thyrsus and a horn brimmed with grapes. Two plaques of a more precious metal, contained by long vine-trailers at the head and foot of the bed, were beaten into a representation of two scenes from the Dionysiac story; the maenads, first, lying ecstatic in the oak-woods; the god himself in the second, at the moment of his victory over Pentheus.

I dared not linger long in the second chamber, where

the mottled snakes of salame hung from the boughs. We bade good-bye to each other over a pink hulk of sow, and I repeated my solemn undertaking that no wholesale dealer in cheeses, salame, and wine who has premises in the Old Kent Road should not be informed of the absurdly favourable terms he would enjoy in dealing with Vincenzo Stenaio.

And at the tangle of paths that fled down the mountain-side, I remembered suddenly that I had received no answer to my question :

'*Potete insegnarmi la strada per Amalfi?*'

No. I could not return and extract an answer. There was only one *strada* in the world that interested Vincenzo at that moment, and that did not lead to Amalfi. I strode blindly down the nearest path, leaving the Crown and Anchor behind me, set high above its olives and vines.

Had I taken the path to the right or the left, would I have plunged into so amazing a country? Would I have found Titan caverns there, hollowed smooth as alabaster out of the mountain's flanks? Would I have seen stalactites carven out of a shining green stone, and porphyry portals that led nowhere at all? Would the torrent that crashed out of the austere sources of Monte Cerreto so orchestrally have distributed the volume of its thunders between strings and woodwind and brass? Was the sky that arched over them first yellow as daffodils, and then, as the cosmic battle broadened over Italy, yellow as the sulphur that fumes upon the smouldering peak of Vulcanetto against the pumice island of Lipari?

It was too much for my feeble heart. As I ran down

this path where surely the goatherds even rarely tread, I lifted my voice to express in song what would else in prosecution have overwhelmed me, seeking escape but finding none, escape in some such familiar hostelry as I had recalled that evening, but brought inexorably back to those lofty obsequies :

A brass moon and a bronze moon
Fought in a sulphur sky.
I was not certain which won
And which lay down to die.

Whether it was the bronze or brass
That dwindled out of space,
I sank down in the tall grass
And tears washed my face.

And then that I should be consoled
For the poor moon that died,
I half ran and half rolled
To an inn by the wayside.

The red wine and white spun
Strongly through my brain
Till the brass moon and bronze moon
Fought in the sky again.

No sound broke the sulphur air
Save a cry of wild swans,
While each slew the other there,
The brass moon and bronze.

I found myself standing on a cliff's edge, looking down towards Amalfi and her lights. The last words of my

threnody had left my lips a moment ago, yet I was aware of a sudden how I was happy. I was happy as only a child is that looks not before nor after. I took myself seriously to task. How could I be so heartless as to permit myself happiness when I had just been the sole witness of so dolorous an event? Would not the wraiths of the slain moons reproach me, trailing their shrouds of star-dust from the cemetery of slain moons in limbo?

But my heart leaped in me. Nothing could abate the supremacy of my content. I was happy, as a wave, a flower, a bird, a child. The world had attained that moment between dusk and night when colour is all annulled. I knew not now whether it was out of green or scarlet stone that the stalactites were carven, or whether the porphyry was purple of those portals that led nowhere at all. Colour ceased. The world was form. The arches over the portals were Arab or Norman or Gothic. The contour of the mountains against a sky that seemed but an attenuation of their own substance was intolerably grand, amazingly diverse. It was as if all space were occupied by a lithograph designed by the prime artist; space knew no more than two dimensions. I alone retained height and breadth and width. In each of them I was happy to their last recess, looking down upon Amalfi. I recalled that some great actress, Bernhardt, I thought, had pronounced no actor to be worth his salt who could not produce tears at will, of joy or sorrow. Should not the more surely I, that was not mumming? Two tears, large and hot, brimmed in my eyes. These were a prism for the lights of Amalfi. Then all the lights floundered suddenly, like numberless silver fish

struggling in a net. The water in the ravine behind me that turns the paper-mills of Amalfi crashed into the third dimension again.

I found my way into the valley bottom and through the smoky tunnels of houses. Now at length the soft sands of Amalfi sifted under my feet.

Of one thing I was certain. I could not repair after such a day to the Albergo di Luna and devour so large and correct a meal as they had served me with the night before. It would be indecorous, and more, it would be uncomfortable. For I had drunk enough wine with Vincenzo, I was certain, to make my interest in eating meagre for weeks ahead. I hunted round for an obscure little *trattoria* where I might order something insubstantial, as it occurred to me. I found just such a place, and entered. A girl led me into the dining-room; there was a mahogany sideboard in it. How has a mahogany sideboard lurched into Amalfi? I disliked the look of it. The girl went off to discover the *padrone* and gave me time to observe that his sole other guests were an American lady and her child, a small boy of six. I gathered she was American from the *Christian Science Monitor* she was reading and the small boy's suit of clothes. Also the small boy said 'Yep!' when his mother asked him to pass the potatoes, and only American small boys say 'Yep!'

The *padrone* entered, a rather ferocious man with imperial whiskers. That sideboard, these whiskers!

'Do you think,' I asked, 'I could have some light dish to eat—a plate of macaroni, perhaps?'

Then the landlord looked at me. He looked me up

and down, then changed his position to look at the other side of me. I must have this perfectly clear. He looked at me all over in a slow, categorical manner that would have infuriated a guinea-pig. My first impression—it may have been the right one—was that he was being sarcastic. It was his intention to show me up before the American lady and her small boy. He kept on looking at me, diagonally, transversely. Order a mere dish of macaroni, would he, this fellow, when my mahogany sideboard aches for the royal imposition of hams and sirloins and logs of braised beef and trenchers of jugged hare that my henchmen are ready to bring forth, should a guest of the sort I am accustomed to make his appearance? Order a trifling dish of macaroni like the meanest fisherman from Atrani?

It is probable that having given birth that day to so large a litter of verses—not a few still-born—I must by now have been in an odd, hypersensitive condition. What right had the fellow to stare me up and down in this preposterous manner? If my appetite went no further than a dish of macaroni, where was the restaurant prodrietor in Europe who 'd thrust a plateful of chops down my throat? I 'd see him hanged first.

Then I let fly. 'If I don't want to eat anything more than macaroni, what do you mean by imagining you 're going to load off the *schifezza* from your scullery on me? I 've ordered macaroni, and if you want to let me have it, get out of it and start work. If you don't, stand out of my way. Above all, for Heaven's sake stop staring at me! Do you hear?'

I have already suggested that his behaviour might have

been the result of the exiguousness of my order. Earlier in the record of this day's events, I put down a later theory ; namely, that I had ordered my macaroni in *terza rima* or some other Italian measure, and that that was the reason of his scrutiny. Had not I expressed myself almost exclusively all day in rhyme and metre ? Would not the behaviour of an English waiter have been distinctly less continent had I addressed him airily :

Waiter, a little soup ; then, if you wish,
Some fish.
And if you ordered it, I would not stop
A chop.
Any old thing you like, save a boiled egg,
I beg.

I have a third theory, which I am often inclined to accept as the true one. When I look back upon myself as I appeared in the *padrone's* eyes, I realize I was clad in a series of garments which might well have provoked so curious an examination. It is not without diffidence that I enumerate them. Upon my head sat a velours hat purchased in Stuttgart, and it looked like it. It contained the sickly brush of *gamsbart* a comedian had stuck behind its ribbon in Fulmpes, Tirol. I became sentimental about it and forbore to remove it. My dark blue shirt was an incompetent early specimen of the work of a decayed Austrian baroness turned needlewoman. My coat was a dove-blue-grey tweed that had been my freshman's delight and my tribulation ever since. A pair of field-glasses was slung over it. My breeches were of corduroy seated with a leather plenilune as substantial

as a suite of horsehair furniture. I was shod with Alpine boots that clanged like a regiment.

Whatever the right theory may be, I had evidently hurt the *padrone's* feelings. The torrent of his eloquence at once blinded and deafened me. Such a plethora of gesture, such a mastery of inflection, I had never met before. It was more like a symphony than anything else I can think of. He presented his first theme : a cat may look at a king. Something of that sort. Then he elaborated it cunningly, dwelling upon the natures of cats and kings. Now in the woodwind a note of doubt began to creep in. Perhaps, after all, this particular cat was not a cat, nor this king a king. The movement died away dubiously. The slow movement began with the first theme ironically inverted. A king may look at a cat. An Italian's restaurant is his castle. An Italian was as good as an Englishman any day. This initiated the series of political considerations which he harked back to in the third movement and which made it, on the whole, rather duller than the two others. Besides, he was getting short of breath. Quite a lot about Malta. A bar or two about France and Savoia. Then finally the summing-up and a reiteration, not very artfully done, of the original motif : a cat may look at a king.

I was very angry indeed. I stormed back at him. He started the symphony again, but eliminated all the suaver instruments. The double-bass boomed, the trombone blared like fury. A vulgar brawl was in progress, nothing less. We caught thunder from each other like rival Joves in a Billingsgate metempsychosis and chucked it about the place. It was altogether common and nasty.

Then suddenly, miraculously, it all stopped. I am tired of the image of a ship's machinery running down, and the succeeding silence being louder than the noise itself. But that was precisely the effect of it. We looked at each other, the *padrone* and I, and were aware that we loved each other, uncontrollably. I could no more hurt that *padrone's* feelings than a baby goldfinch's, he no more mine than a sucking gazelle's.

'Bring me,' I cried, 'bring me a sirloin of beef! Out of my love for you I shall devour it, and another on top of that should you ask me!'

'You would eat something dainty, beloved guest, something that would be like thistledown on the stomach? A fricassee of chickens' brains? Shall I bring you my daughter to follow?'

We compromised on an omelette.

I sat down at a small table, as far from the mahogany sideboard as possible. Two or three minutes passed and the American lady and her child were quiet as the furniture. Faintly through shuttered windows came the whisper of the sea.

Then a boyish treble piped into the stillness:

'Say, mother, who can that guy be that 's just hiked in?'

'Hush, Georgie, hush! That 's an Italian surveyor of taxes!'

Surveyor of taxes? Shall I ever know why she imputed that occupation to me? Was it the field-glasses I was carrying, and did I survey taxes through them?

I whipped round indignantly on my chair.

'Madam, you mistake me. I am no Italian surveyor

of taxes. I am, madam, an English poet. I have this very evening assisted at the obsequies of a brass moon and a bronze moon, and celebrated them in quatrains.'

The lady's knees shook. Her teeth knocked together. 'Begging your pardon, I 'm sure——' she began.

I waved her aside. Italian surveyor of taxes indeed!

'Permit me to quote the verses to you!'

'Please!' she stammered.

I rose and advanced into the centre of the room. I delivered the poem. I returned to my chair and sat down. Silence again for two or three minutes.

Then once more the small boy: 'Gee, I like that. It 's cute. Do it again!'

From the mother anxiously, 'Hush, Georgie, hush! Don't provoke the gentleman!'

I turned towards them with what, I trust, was a winning smile. She smiled back wanly towards me. We entered into conversation, and I was gratified to see the colour mount slowly back into her cheeks. We discussed the comparative merits of the American Express and Thomas Cook, how the Métropole at Naples was a nasty hotel and not to be trusted, but the coffee was always hot at the Santa Lucia. We talked of Cimabue, and Georgie insisted with enthusiasm that though Vesuvius was no great shakes Etna kicked off fireworks nightly. My omelette did not check our amiable garrulity. Georgie said he was going to be a horse officer, and his mother requested him to deliver the words of a horse poem they had taught him way back home. It went like this, I think:

Our bugles sound gaily to horse and
away over the mountains breaks the day then ho
brothers ho for the ride or the fight there are
deeds to be done ere we slumber to-night. . . .

Then I suggested that if, on the other hand, he ever opened an establishment for the sale of salame, cheeses, or wine in the Old Kent Road. . . . I waxed lyrical with the praises of Vincenzo Stenaio. My omelette devoured, and much amiable conversation having passed between us, I made for the door.

'Pardon me,' she exclaimed. 'Pardon me, one moment. It isn't often that we people from Oklahoma have the opportunity outside a lecture-room of meeting an English poet face to face.' She fumbled in her bag and produced a pencil and a small note-book. 'I can't say how much I enjoyed the piece about those two moons. If you 'd only do me the pleasure of telling me your name, so that when I get back home . . .'

'Madam,' I insisted, 'you do me too much honour.'

She looked up inquiringly, insistently.

'Please!'

'My name? Certainly, madam. My name is Alfred Noyes.'

I withdrew from the room without giving myself time to study the effect of the information. I walked reflectively the length of the mackerel-silver sands. What would have been the effect, I wondered, if I had said Alfred, Lord Tennyson?

CHAPTER THREE

THE SALERNO ROAD

I

I SUPPOSE that the continuation of the mountain-road beyond Amalfi towards Salerno is actually not a whit less grand than the section I was already familiar with. But the very Andes could not have scaled the ecstasy of these recent days. In retrospect it seems as if the landscape abated its craggier splendours successively and the sea withheld her headier lures in a slow decline towards Salerno, so that the mind should attain equipoise again upon setting out from Salerno, which is the gate of Paestum, towards those grave temples that reproach mountains for their incoherence and seas their instability.

Certainly a sort of milky mist hung over the day, as if distilled from the broken stalks of a wilderness of spurge, and sea and mountain composed themselves to a noon quiet that set in at dawn. I observed without displeasure that the mood of verse-making no longer agitated me. Yet more than once I could not resist the feeling that the Christian spirit was walking abroad that day seeking whom it might enfold, whom it might wean from that dead Hellenic pagandom whose pillars rise out of the desert shore ; fearful, perhaps, lest that dead spirit be alive still when her own is homeless amid the ruin of her altars. Knowing herself alien to that clarity which had made diamond each particle of air, she was abroad in the company of the faint kindred mist ; disconsolate, it seemed, with the suspicion that already in these lands her nurslings but clothed the spirit of the antique paganism with a tattered garment of her own forms. Yet all day

she urged her cause through the lips of no mean ministers, deploying her argument with symbol, superstition and ceremonial.

Were not the fishermen spreading their nets on the foreshore of Atrani beyond the headland of Amalfi, in this way to seal the day's forehead with symbolic charactery? And when I arrived at the village of Minori were not even its business men aware that now was the time to urge the sale of their goods, not by force of their intrinsic merit, but by the borrowed potency of sacred art? A notice in a window read: *Deposito di Mobili Artistico e Commerciale.* Significant dichotomy! It referred to an extraordinary bedstead which was the sole object displayed, but whether the bedstead was more commercial than artistic I cannot easily pronounce. Its body consisted of a number of interlaced obese designs, and a row of Prussian helmets crested the thing unevenly, like an ill-dressed platoon. But the vendor relied upon neither its artistic nor its commercial merits in the disposing of it. In the upper half was an oleograph of Christ the Shepherd, in the lower a reproduction of Murillo's Assumption. Had the day worked its will upon me, had I returned to Minora to practise the obligations my new creed imposed upon me (why Minora less than any other place?), it would have been at the foot of this commercial-artistic bedstead that night and morning I should have declared my faith.

No great distance further along the coast the fishing-boats of Majori glowed in their coats of yellow and scarlet paint, more vivid than they would have been on a day of less mist. Streamers of gay bunting bound the

masts together, for this was Easter Sunday, the day of the risen Lord. The uncompleted skeleton of a boat seemed rather a derelict that waited the moment of resurrection than a youngling not yet come to birth. A stump round whose upright head the boats had once flung their ropes lay prostrate in the ooze. Even to this warped anatomy extended the day's promise. Some day, like other dead things risen, it should rear its head. Some day—who knew?—the tiny oak-buds would start once more from its veins reflooded with sap.

As if to incarnate this mood of inanimate things, a priest, Christ's minister, was making his Easter rounds between lintel and lintel of the houses of Majori. A youth who attended him held a chased basin of silver, and the priest, solemn in his black vestments, scooped out the holy water with an ancient silver ladle and sprinkled the doorposts. Each little lady that tripped by he greeted with a smile of rare sweetness. It was difficult not to believe that in those eyes and in that heart did not abide certain of the first and last truths.

This gentleness, this insidious sweetness, pursued me over hill and down dale and along the dim sea. Now I stood before the threshold of a Franciscan monastery, and beyond its white-plastered walls was a hint of gardens. Over the door the figure of the saint was put together out of glazed tiles. Immediately above, in a low belfry, two monks, that might have been the saint's own companions, stood tolling the Sabbath bells. One pulled the tongue of the minor bell, the other swung round wholly the bronze of the major. Soul and body, they were entirely subordinate to the harmony they made by

the interchange and correspondence of their movements. To some the Lord's labour is the trimming of gardens, to others the trimming of lamps. To us the ringing of His bells is our dear labour. Ourselves, we are His bells.

'Come in!' they rang. 'This way!' they rang. 'Go no further! Here are the green pastures and the cup brimming over. Lay aside sorrow. Forswear the false joys. Here are the true joys which are Christ's sorrows. Go no further, wanderer, here is the sheepfold. Here the lamp burneth continually, and the continual lamp of flowers. Join with us in the morning's adoration, and the noon's, and the adoration of dusk and midnight. All roads lead from hence and return hither. Nay, nay, nay, goest thou?'

And a deeper tone came into the clanging of the bells:

'Even to the altars we have overthrown? To the place of the abominations? Where yet the impious odour of their sacrifice clogs the air and men impute it to the exhalation of the marshes and the pestilence? Even upon this day of His rising again, shall not the blood from His wounds cease flowing? For thy sake shed, and by thee shed, and thou goest thither, and thou wilt not be stayed? And always in thy scrip shalt thou bear the nails and always in thy hand the lance? Then go, and with thee tribulation. Go, and with thee thirst and hunger and the treachery of those thou lovest. Go, and the darkness pursue thee, and the flame fill it——'

But the bells, pausing upon a crescendo of malediction, swooped down like a flock of birds from that harsh exaltation, and murmured once more upon the comfortable tree-tops:

'But he goes not, nay, no further from our green pastures and the cup brimming over. Here shall his holy and quiet days be hives for the storing of Christ's honey. Here the lamp burneth continually and the continual lamp of flowers. Here are green alleys of cypresses and hushed altars of prayer. Here the Host shall abate his hunger, and the Blood his thirst. Green pastures are here. Green pastures are here . . .'

But fainter and fainter was the clanging of bells as I moved towards the Greek temples of Paestum and the acanthus between the stones, the tall asphodel.

'Green pastures are here. Green pastures are here . . .'

And I remembered the golden pastures of Apollo.

'Green pastures . . . Green pastures . . .'

Far and faint came the noise of the bells, like a whining of insects. The monks were diminished into marionettes, jerking, twitching.

'Green pastures . . .'

The blood of my fathers has reddened them.

But insistently, insidiously, unbearably sweet, all day they tolled in the belfry of my brain.

'Green pastures are here and the cup runneth over. Here the lamp burneth continually. Here is the end of wandering, even the sheepfold.'

II

At the village of Cetara, where the coast is well embarked on the upward thrust towards Salerno, San Francesco presided over my luncheon of eggs, *alici*, salame,

fruit, bread, and moscato—curiously enough strayed out of Tuscany into this Campanian fishing village—to wash them down. But above all, *alici*, a kind of anchovy; for it is the boast of Cetara that goodlier *alici* are pickled nowhere in Christendom. Ask the sindaco of Cetara, himself one of the most distinguished of her picklers. Ask the older men repairing her nets, or the younger dragging them in. As I ate, I looked through the window upon a sprawl of coloured cottages climbing into the shelter of a fort-crested cliff. In the foreground rose a crazy lamp upon three legs, such a property as might travel with a provincial touring company. The little *trattoria* was full of sea-noises.

My host and hostess, lovable ancients, sat marvelling. To grow old so luminously in the shelter of their fort-crested creed, was an argument less easy to gainsay than the insidious and minatory bells.

What? We others knew of the existence of San Francesco?—('We others' being Protestants, Jews, Brahmins, and other heathen, as opposed to 'Christians,' in some lands described as 'Roman Catholics.')

I recounted several stories from the *Little Flowers* of which their pastor had left them in ignorance. They chuckled with pleasure, both because the tales were so winsome and it was I—one of those others—who was telling them.

'But, *signore*, San Francesco is the first saint in heaven!'

'Indeed, yes. San Francesco is the first saint in heaven!'

So I learned, five minutes later, was Sant' Antonio. He it was (or the other) had raised from the tomb a man

of whose murder the saint's father was accused. Whether it was Sant' Antonio or San Francesco I did not need to decide too anxiously, for I have heard the feat imputed to a number of other saints before and since.

'Yes, *signore*, of all the saints in heaven Sant' Antonio is the first!'

The conversation drifted round to San Luigi. He, I think, was the padrone's name-saint; or it may be that they had elicited he was my own. That was it, I am sure; for there was a note of fervent congratulation in their next assertion:

'But San Luigi, does not the *signore* know he is the first saint in heaven?'

'Which San Luigi?'

They looked at me incredulously. Could it be that this other could even distinguish between the San Luigis? How many of the faithful themselves in this godless town of Cetara might not this stranger put to shame?

'San Luigi Gonzaga,' they said. 'No?'

'Alas, I too have outgrown San Luigi Gonzaga. We grow old. We grow old.'

'Then the *signore* may rest content. For if it be San Luigi di Francia no saint in heaven takes precedence over him!' At this moment the old man bent towards his wife's ear, '*Il pane santo!*' I heard him whisper. She shuffled off towards some arcana in the inner room and returned bearing in one hand an object shrouded in a napkin, in the other a souvenir picture-book of St Peter's. The book was put into my hands and I went through the correct stages of excitement, amazement, and disbelief.

'Is it possible?' I murmured.

'*Aspetti*!' crowed the old man. 'Just wait a moment! Now!' he exclaimed suddenly and whipped off the napkin from about his wife's hand. There was a slight suggestion of the conjuror and the rabbit. A circular ring of stale bread was revealed, sprinkled with a black grain.

'How old,' they gloated, 'how old do you think this holy bread is?'

It might have been a week old, or a century. 'Three years!' I ventured.

'No! No!' they cried excitedly. 'Not three years! We had it blessed on the festa of the Archangelo Michele—how old did the *signore* say? Three years? No! Twenty-seven years ago, not a day less than twenty-seven years! I ask you, *signore*. Is not this a miracle, under your own eyes, in your own hands?'

They pressed the bread upon me, and I made as if to test its strength. They stretched their fingers out in fright, and I thereon handled it delicately as a vase. It struck me later that if the bread had become softer rather than harder with the course of the years, it would have been more miraculous. I am glad that at that moment so mean a scepticism did not perturb me.

'*Signore*, can you bring yourself to doubt now?' his voice quivered. Then he checked himself. There was an innate delicacy in him which made him recoil from the suspicion of proselytizing a guest. Moreover, to batter down his resistance with a loaf that bristled with miracle like the cohorts of the archangel, was to take him at a disadvantage. 'It is curious, at least, *signore*, no?'

I sipped my moscato reflectively. 'It is more than curious!'

'Go, Lina!' said the old man, 'bring your son!' So intelligent a stranger did not chance upon Cetara every day. The wife returned with her latest born, Gennaro, a youth who had attained considerable distinction, they told me, in the art of pickling *alici*. He had extracted from it a new brown suit with a waist and oblique pockets, which he wore for the first time that day. He was acutely conscious of the suit, and looked a little as if he feared that the stranger might appropriate it. 'Have you ever been to Naples at the time of the liquefaction of your name-saint's blood?' I asked, feeling that it was the sort of thing expected from me, and not knowing what other lines conversation with a Gennaro might take.

The father slapped his thighs in his enthusiasm. '*E pensare, Gennaro, che questo signore non e nemmeno cristiano!*'

'I shall go with my *fidanzata* in May,' said the young man.

'I wish I could go with you. And later we might attend the liquefaction of San Panteleone's blood in Ravello, it might be. And then who knows? How long can a man stand out against such things?'

'Indeed, yes,' said the father. 'For among all the saints in heaven, who stands nearer to God than Gennaro and Panteleone?'

Even more than the miracles of the bread continuous and the blood liquefied, the old man's gentleness was beginning to subdue me. I felt his soft and dexterous

thumbs compelling me into his own mould. I even divined why Francesco and Antonio, Luigi Gonzaga and Luigi di Francia, Gennaro and Panteleone, any saint at all in the hierarchy, so soon as he emerged out of that radiant welter, was elected to the right hand of God. It was nothing but this same invincible gentleness. He could not allow himself to hurt the feelings of any of them, each and all must be accredited with the seat of ultimate honour. None of them, of course, would be taken in ; they knew their heavenly places too well for that. But after their brief evocation they would resume their duties with a pleasant feeling that if the Authorities did not recognize the merit of their martyrdoms too fulsomely, there still remained appreciative human beings who realized that it was unpleasant, really it was unpleasant, to be thrown to the lions or flayed alive or roasted slowly over a grid.

I said *addio* to Gennaro and his parents. They wished to press some *alici* upon me, but I was not certain they would not spoil in my pocket.

'Who knows, *signore* . . .' ventured the old man, 'by the time you return to accompany Gennaro and his *fidanzata* to the festa of the blood, who knows whether you yourself may not be——'

A note of sadness crept into his voice. He did not complete the sentence.

'Who knows ?' I echoed. 'Who knows ?'

I passed out towards the mountain-road again, and away beyond the village of Vietri to the cross-roads that lead north to the village of Cava, and east to Salerno—to Apollo and his golden pastures, to the temples of Paestum.

III

At this point it was that the day's skilfullest web lay waiting for me. I sometimes wonder whether the amber-eyed peasant youth that sat by the roadside devouring salame and a chunk of bread and saluted me so cheerfully that I sat down and smoked while he ate, whether he was indeed what he seemed. Or was he an emissary from those powers that were so actively abroad all that day? And did he not, when I tore myself away from him and the miracle whither he was leading me on the Cava road, did he not disappear with a suddenness and completeness which it was difficult to account for save on the hypothesis I can hardly bring myself to enunciate?

Yet for the most part he seemed human and peasant enough. He wore a straw hat at an angle, and was evidently very proud of it. It would not be easy to believe it the metamorphosis, for the hour or two of his sojourn upon earth, of his celestial halo. And if in those far choirs his own instrument was the psaltery or the shawm, would he have condescended to the mouth-organ? Yet why not? Had he carried with him a shawm or a psaltery is it not probable that my suspicions would have been provoked too early? He wore his sunflower-yellow shoes as if he were not used to them. Here either hypothesis, angel or peasant, would meet the case. His feet walked naked on the supernal meadows upon other days? His feet, saving at the time of festa, were encased in goatskin?

One thing, however, was certain, whether the sunflower-yellow shoes had anything to do with it or no.

Half-way down his legs he was afflicted with boils. He lifted his trouser-legs and untied the strings of his pants, which in these parts mysteriously fasten themselves about the ankles—I cannot gather why, or prefer not to. He unbound a handkerchief from the afflicted region and then reverently produced a packet of tissue-paper.

'That is a paste, no, smeared on to the paper?' I asked. 'Animal or vegetable?'

The youth smiled darkly. 'Paste? *Niente!* It is two leaves sanctified by the Dead Man of Cava this morning!' He replaced the packets carefully over his disaffection and tied the kerchief again. 'I have been suffering like this for three weeks,' he proceeded, 'though there was only one of them till last Tuesday. They would have spread all over but for the Dead Man of Cava. Now I feel them going down already. They will have disappeared altogether by to-morrow.'

'Indeed,' I said, 'what is this business about a dead man curing boils? Since when have dead men . . .'

Artfully he disregarded my question for a moment. 'Not that you must think,' he insisted, 'that it does you any harm to break out like this once a year. It is a sign of the purity of the blood!'

His physiology was interesting, but I did not pause to discuss it. 'This Dead Man of Cava,' I urged, 'tell me. Is it a saint of those parts or a thigh-bone?'

He readjusted the strings of his pants round the ankle. 'It cannot be that you have heard no rumour concerning him? It is not possible!'

'Alas, it is true. I have been walking about among these mountains and have hardly seen a soul for days.'

'But what goatherd cannot have heard of him? No one told you of the old man of Cava—there has not been a better Christian in this country since the twelve apostles—and how with his last breath he ordered his daughter to listen at his grave. . . . No, you are making a *scherzo* with me. You are on your way to him yourself. What is it? Kidneys? One eye, does it become blind?'

'You talk of his last breath. He is dead, then? How shall he cure my kidneys? Or your boils?'

'So they have not told you how he ordered his daughter to listen above his grave on the seventh sunrise from the day of his burial? And how she heard him knocking at the lid of his coffin and she went and told the priest and the priest had the earth shovelled out of his grave? And how they lifted the coffin-lid and he sat up and said a *Pater Noster*?'

'But this is a tale for the *bambini*. Who ever heard of an old gentleman sitting up in his coffin and saying *Pater Noster* seven days after his burial?'

'Then,' said he quietly, 'we will go to Cava together and you will tell me if your own eyes and ears lie!'

'I heard of a saint in Calabria who only last month was blessed with the stigmata, like San Francesco. *Questo non mi meraviglia . . .*'

'Yes,' he put in, 'I also have heard of him.'

'But a dead man saying *Pater Noster*——'

'A great deal more than that,' he declared evenly. 'He is sitting up in his bed at this moment healing the sick and dealing out charity to the poor. Old family troubles that kept Cava unquiet for generations are being

settled by his bedside. The last person from the village to come in was the doctor. He said there was some trickery in it—the same doctor who signed his death-certificate.'

'And what happened?'

'The Dead Man held out a knife to him. "Cut this vein!" he said. He did. The blood spurted out fresh and clean. The doctor wanted to tie up the arm, and the Dead Man said, "No, there is more blood in the fountain from which this flows!"' The youth's eyes burned, but his manner still was curiously self-contained.

'Would it be the same before a *forestiere*, an unbeliever?'

'*Forestieri* are coming in from Naples and Palermo and Florence. Come, if you still do not believe, he will hold out the knife to you too.'

'But you are coming away from him!'

'Yes, my parents will be expecting me. They will want to know how it happened. But I will come with you to the Dead Man of Cava if you wish it. It will please him if I bring in an unbeliever who at the day's end will believe.'

That above all, I remember, how quiet he was, how unforced. As if he divined that if I became conscious of any attempt at coercion, I would turn tail like a frightened satyr and make for the groves of oak.

'Cava is not far from here?' I asked.

'A few kilometres. We could take a train.'

'This road here to the north?'

'This road to the north!'

I was aware we were already walking along it. I was aware that I was absolutely convinced of the truth of

every word he had said. I am convinced now. I am convinced of the truth of the stigmata of the Calabrian Francis and the Francis from Assisi. I am convinced of the annual and simultaneous liquefaction of Gennaro's blood at Naples and Pozzuoli. I am convinced of miracles before every altar where they are prayed for, or believed in, with sufficient passion. I am convinced of miracles also in mosque and synagogue and Baptist chapel and cirque of Druidic stones.

I was aware I would be the slave of none of them. I was aware that no bud opening this spring was less a miracle, and no bird, singing or silent.

I was aware of Greece, how Greece was dead and would make no demands upon me, how Greece was living and had my loyalty. I was aware that my liberty I would surrender to none, I that had gone forward out of slavery would not be drawn thither again.

'No!' I said quietly, even as he had spoken to me. 'No! I cannot go with you! My road lies eastward along the sea!'

He said nothing. He lowered his hands. His eyes burned still, but there was more ash than flame in them.

I turned on my heel from him, back to the cross-roads and away to Salerno. I turned for a moment to salute him, for he had been kindly. He was not there. The day's last net had been thrown. My limbs were free still to make forward for Hellas.

PAESTUM

THE very desolation which encompasses the Greek temples at Poseidonia—Paestum is the name of the Latin town—invests them with a sort of authority denied to other pre-Christian cities in Italy and Sicily ; makes of Paestum, far more than Classe or Pompeii or Girgenti or Syracuse, the eternal mansion of the pagan spirit. Classe in the Adriatic marshes lies under the shadow of Sant' Apollinare, and for all that clatter of Roman ship-building which once resounded there, no sound is heard now excepting a sleepy Christian music in the subsiding belfry. As for Pompeii, you might think that only to Englishmen and Americans (and it may be a German or two) has the word any association of marble and bronze and lewd pagan festival. To the southerner it is essentially a Campanian village where a particularly efficient Madonna is housed, and the shiploads of pilgrims from the Parthenopean islands, the multitudes brought in on chars-à-bancs from Naples and Castellammare, carry thence rather a sanctified booklet narrating her miracles than a Bulwer Lytton conserving reverently a spray of rosemary plucked from the garden of the House of the Vettii. The saffron-tawny Temple of Concord in Girgenti against the African sea owes her preservation to the accident which in the middle ages built a Christian church in the shelter of her impious pillars. The cathedral of Syracuse has embraced, but not successfully, the huge bulk of the Temple of Diana, so that the pillars and capitals project from the baroque stucco like the ribs of a marine monster which the white whale, over-estimat-

ing the span of his jaws, attempted to swallow, but achieved in the attempt a secular lockjaw.

So that in all these places, saving only in Paestum, the pagan and Christian spirit are still at war. And though it is true that Christianity early established itself in Paestum, not many centuries elapsed before the Saracen pestilence completed what the pestilence of malaria had long ago begun, and the Christians fled to the hill-tops, leaving to Poseidon and Demeter the accursed plain. Here they persist, they and no other gods, Poseidon the earth-shaker and Demeter the wanderer with lighted brands.

As I passed under the massive travertine arch in the circuit of their antique walls, it did not seem possible that the young peasant had ever existed, nor ever might exist, whom the Dead Man of Cava had healed. Nor he, nor the gentle old man of Cetara, nor the monastery and its whining bells, nor all that spirit they had voiced or incarnated.

In this place you might feel, if not elsewhere in earth at all, that should the earth shake, or the calm waters of the adjacent sea advance howling upon Poseidon's altar, it is the god himself who convulses them, wrathful that no lamp burns before his image, and young flesh is not slain for him, nor incense heaped. Should Etna blaze, when you repaired hence to Sicily, it was because Demeter's altar in Poseidonia, and in this city and in another, was lonely. For though in their seasons bloomed 'roses and the crocus and fair violets and flags, and hyacinths, and above all the strange flower of the narcissus,' Persephone never gathered them again; and though summer returned with a waving of corn and the

swelling grape, the spirit of the flowery girl was not in them. A more resolute deity than Aidoneus had borne her into a palace whence there was no going again. And wilder and wilder though the flare might be of the torches the distraught mother kindled from the furnace of Etna, and more desperately though she thrust them to illumine the gulfs of heaven and the abysses of sea, never again her eyes beheld Persephone.

Or she will? And once more these melancholy meadows where the pestilence is not at rest will be a glory of gold corn rippling in the winds, like the carpet of a princess beaten out by her handmaidens?

Without the walls star of Bethlehem was growing. I could not find it within. Purple stock grew out of the capitals of the temple miscalled the 'Basilica.' There was much asphodel, flower of the unburied. But thorns and ferns and thistles grew more thickly—especially that flat spiny thistle with white striations, each plant a republic of snails. There was also a great riot of acanthus leaves. It seemed not too fanciful to see in it a symbol of the victory gained over this rigorous superb Doric by the luxurious complexity of the Corinthian order. Slate-snouted lizards pursued each other lustfully; one shed her tail in terror as her lover panted behind her.

And when Persephone is returned to Demeter? What radiant flowers will replace this cadaverous opulence? And the milk-white kids will be about the edges of the city, and lambs crying?

I heard no sound save a donkey braying under Poseidon's temple. It seemed the just articulation of this ruin. Mournful and grotesque the brayings assailed the ear,

yet with a sense of timelessness that made the beast greater than nature—a mythic monster in the company of griffin or unicorn. His ears flapped in the heat like wings. No other person beside me was in Paestum that day save a small wizened German, an archaeologist from Heidelberg. He seemed not wholly human in his dartings between column and column. His movements made no more noise than a lizard in the grass. I lay prostrate upon the raised sidewalk of the Roman avenue to the west of the temples, and the sun from the hot stones and the sun from the hot air mingled in my blood. As I regarded this strange man through half-shut eyes, he seemed now and again to curve his small slim length about a column, as a lizard might ; and now to lie flat under a shadow, his head raised, his small eyes watchful. His ears were tense, as if he might apprehend some tiny voice out of the heart of the square boulders below him or the round drums above, some voice that might convey to him any minute secret of the numberless that lie entombed here, secrets of the hand that builded, the brain that designed, the soul that conceived, and each so marvellous. Now he was all movement again, scraping with his fingers like some rodent in the rubble of a pit or in the foundations of a house. Or now, like a woodpecker against the bark of a tree, he was tapping, tapping with his hammer.

Then, like some beast that has emerged from its earth, stoat or otter, but is not wholly certain that all is well, he turned his head about from side to side with infinite circumspection. His beady eyes were upon me. I lay prone as lead. Then he ducked suddenly to the floor

of the cella in the Temple of Poseidon where his researches had carried him. Swiftly and delicately he kissed the stone, then was away once more with his hammer tapping, tapping the russet-shadowy pillars. And where he moved, as if he scraped a crust out of their flutings that put forth wings ere it fell, flickered a cloud of rust-red butterflies.

I did not see him again for an hour or two, for I lay without moving as a sequence of slow dreams marched through my brain, with a noise of grave draperies and a shining of Tyrian purple, fine metal and ivory. It was in a deep oblong pit by the temple of Persephone I saw him again. The place was a thicket of stinging nettles taller than a man. With a busy furtive inquisitiveness he poked about among their roots, and the leaves bent down and kissed and stung him. There was a kind of ecstasy in his eyes and gestures. I could not but recall the youth in the *Hill of Dreams* rolling in a naked rapture among the Roman nettles.

As I wandered thus across the thorns and thistles, my head still heavy with my dreaming, I was startled by the sound of some one fluting upon a hollow reed. For a moment the appositeness of it pleased me, but for a moment only. I found myself quivering with indignation. Had some poor fool out of the colleges, or perhaps the theatre green-rooms, invaded this solemnity to make in it his fatuous literary noise? Should the desert altars of the enormous gods be the stage for his vanity? Had he crowned, intolerable mummer, his brows with a garland of leaves? And his woman stood by, fumbling with apertures and exposures?

But I was wrong. I bowed my head with shame of my impatience. Hidden from me behind a fig-tree, a sallow peasant from some hovel beyond the temples was sitting, a flute cut from the same tree at his lips. He wore a battered Neapolitan hat, his shirt-sleeves were patched, and badly. His bony knees had worn through the patches on his trouser-legs. Here was no more affectation than in the peasant who sat in the same place three thousand years ago, and made this same music, and a wreath of wild parsley was on his head in place of the hat from Naples. And so long as men in lonely lands, men born out of that loneliness, cut a thin young shoot from a fig-tree and make a flute from it to cheer their solitude, the notes will always be as few and sweet and crude. The man found his flute not firm enough to suit him and threw it away; then drawing out a jack-knife, hoary for him with memories of bivouac on the Carso, he cut himself a firmer shoot. Slowly he worked the young skin from about the green wood, hollowed out his stop and completed his new instrument.

Then with his finger at the hollow end, and his lips above the opening, he brought out again this melancholy playing, like a sound at the beginning or the end of the world. He wished to cut me also a flute—but how dared I play on it? And then, when his playing ceased, we talked of the malaria, for the music seemed but its prelude or its utterance. No year passed in which he did not suffer from it. That was the reason of those sallow cheeks and the emaciated hands. In the high road against the temple of Persephone rose a small grim building, leering out towards her comely pillars. *Am-*

bulatorio antimalarico read the legend above its door. It seemed a mortuary rather. And a coldness stole across my heart, which seemed a premonition of the sickness in my own bones, or a breath out of the mouths of the unhoused, superseded, superseding gods.

As I thrust my way through the rank vegetation between the encompassing wall and the temple, the little German was flickering again like a candle between the pillars. I could now no longer determine clearly which of the things about me were living and which were long dead. Was that other a spirit bound for ever within the confines of Poseidonia for some antique sin against the god, that he had no wit to expiate all these centuries? And I, for desiring too ardently to attain this place of the sun's ardour among these unquenched temples, should I never go forth from them again? Like Leviathan heaving upon the waters, I saw far to the north the Sorrentine peninsula projecting its scaly neck. And the mountains southward, peak beyond peak, sunward to Sicily. At my feet, solemnly, immemorially, two armies of ants defiled, going forth empty for spoil and returning laden. Sole citizens of Poseidonia!

Tapping, tapping, like a woodpecker. . . . The tiny noise of the hammer made the stillness too profound to be borne. Was it my heart beating or the Hellene phantom that had taken for this day the shape of a little scholar from Heidelberg?

Then of a sudden the air broke into song, rowdy, reassuring. I lifted my eyes and perceived that a party of peasants had come up out of the plain and was moving along the width of the wall, like a frieze in motion.

Sharp and black they were outlined against the flawless screen of sky. And whether they themselves knew from old experience how sombre, how mortiferous, was the air that stood amongst these temples, dealing a subtler death than the familiar exhalations, so that they felt they must give each other courage as they passed by, or whatever the motive was that actuated them, there was a note of defiance in their singing. At another time I might have thought it was merely the engaging Fascist braggadocio, reinforced as the idea was by the actual song, of which the words had become familiar to me all over Italy. But I could not think, here in Poseidonia, it was that alone.

Botte, botte, botte, sempre botte,
Chi tocca un fascista a pericolo di morte.

So they sang vaingloriously. But for me the especial significance of it was deeper and more joyous. They laid the ghosts of Paestum for me and at the same time revivified it. My mind leaped back to this dead city in its prime. I heard the noise of metal beaten upon stone and metal riveted together. I saw children that went down among the streams to gather flowers for holy purposes. I heard the young athletes encouraging each other to add a span and still another span to their leaping, and heard the women discussing out of what vegetables they were cooking the day's dinner. The air was full of political discussion, for the elections were at hand. And the party of Triptolemus, the richest merchant of Poseidonia, passed along the walls singing their election song defiantly. Triptolemus has been no niggard with his wines, by Bacchus! Poor Miltiades! Wretched

little bookworm! What hope for Miltiades? And the chorus once more—how does the chorus go? They lifted the words into the air, as they moved like a frieze in motion against the flawless screen of sky:

Botte, botte, botte, sempre botte,
Chi tocca un fascista a pericolo di morte.

I followed shamelessly in their wake, declaring as loudly as they my double allegiance to Mussolini and Triptolemus. But they went only to Capaccio. That was the name of their village, I think.

I went further afield.

SICILY, JOURNEY'S END

I

THE gods and the railway company directors dispose their junctions with a pretty sense of ironic values, and succeed in concentrating in them all that is most insufferable in the conditions they preside over. Bletchley for Oxford is the classic instance, but Steinach for Rothenburg runs it close. I commend you to Battipaglia for Calabria, however, should you desire to anticipate by a sort of homoeopathy the longueurs of purgatory. If you are so disconsolate as to fear the acuter longueurs of heaven, *a fortiori* submit to Battipaglia. The place is even duller in retrospect than it was in actual experience, for it prolongs its drab hours between Greece and Greece —Paestum and Sicily. The scored and tattered time-table which is my dearest remembrancer of these times (for I can at will transport myself in its *direttisimi di lusso* to Megara Iblea or Porto Empedocle or Domodossola) endeavours vainly to convince me that I spent no more than fours hours and nine minutes in Battipaglia. But sympathetic as the time-tables are, issued by the firm of Enrico Arcani of Florence, they have no conception, fortunately perhaps, of the relativity of time. And had I not spent the hours preceding Battipaglia in Paestum nor the months succeeding it in Sicily, I should no doubt have raised a paean to the comfort of its waiting-room, the excellence of the *cuisine* at its restaurant, and the beautiful symmetry of its points and sidings, convinced I had spent no more than a blissful hour there.

I entered the south-bound train that evening with such

fervour that the occupants of my carriage deemed me either to be escaping from an uncongenial bride forced upon me by my harsh parents, or to be hastening to attach myself to a congenial maiden denied me by hers. I complicated the situation by sucking *confetti* or sugared almonds, as we call them, (hoping thereby to banish the taste of Battipaglia veal cutlets). In Italy the bride and bridegroom ceremonially present all their acquaintance with *confetti* for days before the happy event, and what I was doing sucking them myself in such large quantities could not be divined. Perhaps they had got a secret grip of me like opium or cocaine? Perhaps the very day before my wedding, I realized how large a store of *confetti* still lay unravished, and had slunk out and stolen them? Throwing over my bride, my friends and my good name, clasping the insidious sweets to my breast, I had fled over the mountains to Battipaglia. Perhaps—but it occurred to me that nothing short of the one motive or the other, the uncongenial bride or the congenial maiden, would ever bring me to Battipaglia again.

There came a moment in the journey when I realized that *confetti* had lost their power to console me. Probably no stretch of railway in Europe passes under so many and such malodorous tunnels, and when the train was not howling in the belly of one tunnel it was screaming as it emerged from another, or shrieking as it entered a third. My mind was occupied with a nice chemical consideration. These fumes that swirled beyond the sealed windows and clawed at them or slid down streaming, though they looked so virulent, could they in fact *taste* so virulent as the fumes that occupied the carriage? I put my hand

behind me and below. Since when had the Italian State Companies decided upon a scheme of upholstery in cast-iron for third-class carriages ?

It was an hour or so after midnight at a place called Belvedere Marittimo that I secured a corner seat. Belvedere Marittimo ! It seemed to me the most consummate irony the company had yet achieved. I burst into a peal of hollow laughter. Some invisible creature in the opposite corner ghostily echoed me. I shuddered.

An old woman had got into the train a station or two beyond Agropoli. She had never made a railway journey in her life before, but her youngest son lay dying in Catania, and she was not to be withheld from the great adventure. At the first tunnel we entered, she crumbled completely, and put her hands over her head as if to protect it from the collapsing mountain. 'Maria Vergine !' she cried, and made the sign of the cross, then fumbled with her rosary. She fell into a fitful doze, and whenever she awoke, the tunnel was a new experience for her. She learned nothing from her previous immunities. 'Maria Vergine !' again and again came her breath gustily.

The man opposite me snored. Not in the most pandemonic of the tunnels did not his snore prevail, plangent and serene. Then his snoring ceased, and he began talking in his sleep. So many boxes of biscuits, was his refrain, so many boxes of dried fruit. So many sacks of rice, so many sacks of lentils. There was something hieratic in his enunciation of these things—rice, lentils, biscuits. Then there was a little gurgle in his throat, and the disposition of his involuntary faculties was

rearranged. He abandoned his biscuits. Clear across the tunnels his effortless snore prevailed.

Then I took to reciting 'The Raven,' but I could not sleep. And then I declaimed 'The Garden of Proserpine,' but that made me more wakeful. I fooled about with the sheep and the gap in the hedge, and cursed them in my folly. And then I remembered *Middlemarch*.

An astounding blue of sea and sky surged against my sight when I awoke. I rubbed my eyes incredulously and the train bolted into a tunnel. 'I am still asleep,' I assured myself, 'in the bosom of George Eliot.' But the astounding blue recurred. 'It's true!' I cried, 'but impossible!'

The blue of sea and sky became truer and more impossible as the day advanced. Had I realized at the moment of waking (which was but half an hour or an hour after dawn) that the blue I gazed on incredulously was but a mist compared with the barely tolerable intensity of the noonday blue which flickered over Sicily and burned between Scylla and Charybdis, I might in fear of so much beauty have headed for Battipaglia again. Or perhaps anywhere but Battipaglia.

When at length the mountains of Sicily hove into sight, I hardly dared look at them. My voice was husky as I turned rigidly away to salute the gentleman of the lentils. He yawned as a dog yawns, with a complete relapse of the lower jaw and the tongue suspended over the chin. Slowly his lower jaw sought the other again, while his eyes regarded me at their leisure. Then he said, '*Buon' giorno!*' and took a number of papers

out of his pockets and industriously totted up liras and kilos.

Perhaps he had got into the wrong train? He could not be aware that over the water soared the grand mountains of Sicily, clear of outline as statues and purple as wine? He had got the wrong connection at Battipaglia, having intended to do the Birmingham circuit before making a clean sweep of Cardiff?

The words were trembling upon my lips: 'Sir, I hate to interrupt your accounts, but it has occurred to me that perhaps . . . I wonder if, sir, you have not taken the wrong turning? I beg your pardon? Precisely. Yes, yes, most annoying. At Battipaglia, you say? Anything can happen at Battipaglia. The Birmingham express leaves at two-thirty, unfortunately. That means eight hours' wait in that insufferable station. I say, I *am* sorry. You see, in a country like Sicily, equally divided between goatherds and brigands, the first will not buy your goods and the second will not pay for them. An awkward dilemma. And Etna, after all—I have not yet seen it; I suppose in a few minutes it will loom up beyond the bend of the coast—Etna, after all, I say, is a dull mountain. Do you know Muswell Hill? And these Greek temples and Roman theatres, their beauties are exaggerated. Why, they haven't even finished building them. Interrupted by the War, I understand.'

And then the gentleman opposite to me replied (though he neither moved his lips nor lifted his eyes from his calculations): 'Young man, I 've met your sort before. Think yourself smart, don't you? A fine time you 'd

think *you* were having if you got nothing more to eat than fennel and goat's-meat all the time you were in Sicily. Here we take all the trouble of coming down from a Christian city like Milan to a swine's country like Calabria or this Sicily of yours, to provide you with an occasional civilized meal, and this cheap sarcasm is all we get for our pains. You don't even know which side your own bread 's buttered. You think you 've got a sense of romance and poetry, do you ? Cheapjack stuff you 've picked up from the popular educators ! Where 's your sense of historical perspective, which is worth all your Theocrituses rolled into one ? Don't you see that I 'm the Greek trader out of Messene in the Peloponnese, visiting the city of my kinsman Anaxilas, bringing with me, at his request, a few little home comforts to make the barbarous place a little more endurable ; or a banker on a visit from Corinth, to see how the younger generation manages these things in the new colony of theirs at Syracuse, which is forging ahead so rapidly according to all accounts ? Or a bearded merchant from Phoenicia, with bales of silk and parcels of cinnamon and cloves ? Historical perspective—— ' he was repeating in an acid voice. But I was aware of a presence beyond the window. It was Etna, overtopping Sicily, Etna, filling the sky, a vast, pale, inverted lily.

' You 're a liar ! ' I cried brusquely. ' You were putting it on, like me ! Here 's Etna, man ! For God's sake lift your eyes a moment, then drop them humbly again. If you haven't spat too much on the floor under your feet, kneel, man, kneel ! '

But he didn't. He went on totting up his liras and

kilos as industriously as before. And being arrived at the station of Villa San Giovanni that faces Messina, I jumped out of the train. Either here or at Reggio the ferry takes you across the straits. But it was my intention to walk slowly all day along the road between these two places, so that the pageantry of sea and mountain and sky that once had delighted the gods, might now delight a clay mortal.

After the corruption I had breathed for so many hours, I took in great lungfuls of air, like a man quenching his thirst with beer. Then I grew fastidious about it, like a man playing with an old rare brandy. I sniffed it delicately, allowed drops of it to rest coolly upon my curved tongue, and rolled it about my palate. Then I sallied forth into the village for breakfast. I found it in a cavernous *trattoria*, under whose single vault the young man and woman who owned it combined their kitchen, restaurant, and sleeping apartment, the first two being separated from the third by a screen of sacking. A bowl of warm milk was set before me and a loaf of black bread. Then they fried over the charcoal the fish called *triglie* (which is red mullet) fresh from the straits, a small and tasteful creature. As quickly as I devoured one, another was removed hissing from the pan. I wondered were any *triglie* left in the straits of Messina.

II

So I set forth for Reggio, in the path of the earthquake of December 1908. It occurred to me after I had seen Villa San Giovanni, Reggio and Messina, all of which had been overwhelmed by it, that places as well as people

meet disaster with contrasted spirits. Messina was intolerably insulted by it, resentful. The whole savour of the place was wormwood. Had not history already done her injury beyond injury for thirty centuries? In Reggio it seemed to release a flood of almost transatlantic energy. She seemed to have exulted in the opportunity to show that no Middle Western city could create banks and shops and boulevards more efficiently than she. Not even earthquake seemed to have agitated the indolence of Villa San Giovanni. Here and there some countryman had bestirred himself from his slumbers to rebuild his homestead. But the hod still lay where it had slipped from his hand and his mortar had hardened into the appearance of volcanic slag. So drowsy was the air of this place, even so soon after dawn, that certain of the ruins, which elsewhere you could recognize quickly enough as the work of the earthquake, so crudely and tragically have they collapsed, seemed to be the houses the colonists of Magna Graecia had built, and no man had touched them since. Canopies of vines overshadowed the road and they seemed colossal as the baldacchino at St. Peter's. Nowhere else in Italy are the chestnut poles that support them so tall. They gave the impression that it was enough for the folk of these parts to grow as many grapes as possible with the least possible trouble of binding, tacking, and pruning, however savage a wine might ensue. Compare with them the meticulous tripods of Tuscany, where not a trailer or twig is overlooked, then hold before the mind's eye the pale fastidiousness of Tivoli, the dark ferocity of Corleone.

The road crossed the broad beds of torrents long ago

dried, thrusting their stony way down the flanks of Aspromonte. A traveller might have received the impression that some grandiose demigod of a stage-manager—a Titan forbear of that pretty artificer of Capri—had expressly designed the road itself between Villa San Giovanni and Reggio to be so tame and its background in Calabria to be so chaotic that the mind might be the more stupefied by this blue floorcloth of the straits and the Olympian backcloth of Sicilian mountain. The road was littered by the earthquake's rubble where it had fallen. The fruit-trees seemed dusty and dispirited. A cart stood tilted in the torrent-bed while some peasant listlessly shovelled gravel into it. Aspromonte sprawled monstrous out of its fastnesses, as from the black breeding-place of formless pre-Hellenic gods.

But over the water those ranges of proud mountains. And the colours that all day succeeded each other upon their sea-battered bases, upon the belts of pine and oaks, upon the final glancing or glimmering peaks. The great spine of the Monti Peloritani declaring to the coast what path it must follow. Pinnacle and ravine and precipice, all the landscape where the spirit of Shelley and Prometheus inhabited, hanging like vapour, lowering like doom. All, all subordinate to the awful image of Etna, soaring out of his groves and woods to those purest airs where his snows were folded about him. Higher and higher than these to the swart plume that stood poised over him, like his own thought manifest, pondering calamity.

The clang of an electric tram startled my soul as it

swooned over the crater's edge. But my body was not weary enough to submit to the indignity of being carted into Reggio like a bundle of vegetables. Not for me when I arrive in a new city do *cocchieri* declare that their carriages are drawn by doves and made out of cedar padded with down. Nor do taxicabs lure me, tired though I may be, nor tramcars clang for me. How I heaped malediction upon this particular arrogance as I plodded down the specious main road into Reggio, straight as a line of latitude ; how I should have welcomed a wheelbarrow even, had I not sworn a vow. The straightness of the road and of all the roads in Reggio was but part of the feverish architectural energy that succeeded the earthquake. Everybody knows that the easiest way to build a road is to make a detour round all obstacles, to dip with all the hollows—no nonsense about viaducts or tunnellings. The Reggians, at least, like the ancient Romans, would not permit themselves such indolence. And they built themselves a promenade which would look a little inflated in an international waterside capital and blocks of buildings that might make the City of London look provincial. Nor did they overlook the claims of the aesthetic spirit to consideration. For they erected a number of churches on the most scrupulous Romanesque patterns, which looked precisely as if they might be dismantled next day when the cinema company moved on.

I deposited my rucksack in a hotel and demanded coffee, wondering what had happened to Aspromonte. When I climbed out of this copybook city by the sea's edge, and into the higher parts, I realized it had not been mislaid.

Here the earthquake still rioted in a ruin of squinting streets. The children barked like a bastard breed from the loins of those clumsy pre-Hellenic gods of Aspromonte that had mated with the sluts of upper Reggio. A party of small boys crept up behind an old woman and upset her basket of vegetables. 'Brothel-children!' she cried. 'Children of loose women! Your mothers had men to eat, not macaroni!'

One gay moment lit up the squalor. Two tiny girls were playing horses. The driver looked purposeful, the horse bright with fancies. She had poppies behind her ears and in her hair poppies. There were circlets and festoons of poppies about her waist and limbs, till the child herself bloomed one wayward poppy. She was a child born safely after the earthquake. I saw an earthquake-child that night in the restaurant, smaller than this other and twice as old. He entered with a guitar larger than himself and a sister with ear-rings almost her own size, pendulous like dewlaps. The girl at ten was antique as any waxen Madonna, ineffably self-possessed. The boy was timid and still looked a mere infant though he was five years her senior. Born, *signore* (the waiter assured me), on the night of the earthquake. Two months too soon. Perhaps, poor creature, he had lifted his first cry to drown the hideous hubbub, for his voice as he sang was cracked, as if he had not yet recovered from that ill-matched competition.

There was another child, prematurely old as he was prematurely young, at a street-corner selling combs, but this child was merrier. He could have given lessons in salesmanship to any of the countless commercial travellers

with whom my third-class journeying down the peninsula of Italy had made me familiar. I was only less familiar with the particular object the child in Reggio was negotiating—a sort of metal comb pretending to be bone, which I had seen hawked without any success whatsoever in every train and every piazza. So far as I could determine, all the baffled pedlars of Germany and Italy (for the stuff had been dumped in the second country as wholly unmarketable in the first) had handed over their stocks to the young merchant from Calabria. He stood surrounded by a large number of wooden packing-cases, each of which in its turn contained a large number of cardboard boxes, and these last, finally, as many combs as there are hairs on the heads of the white races.

The child took out a haphazard comb from a haphazard cardboard box in one of the nearer cases. '*L'ultimo!*' he cried. '*Chi lo vuole?* The last, absolutely the last! Who wants it?'

A hand was reached forth. The comb passed between the tiny and the hairy hands. Another comb was lifted. '*L'ultimo!* The last! Who wants it? Who 's going off without one when there 's still a comb to be had? *L'ultimo!*'

Another hand reached forward. The contents of that cardboard box were exhausted. He removed the lid from another. '*L'ultimo! Chi lo vuole?*' He detailed the peculiar merits of his combs. Not only had they the virtues of irrefragability, but all the savour and rare quality of the flimsiest fragibility. In colour they were incomparable, in hygiene unimpeachable. Since hair was invented this was the comb it had waited for.

'*L'ultimo! Chi lo vuole?*' One after one he disposed to the hypnotized crowd an eternal succession of absolutely the last combs. You might have thought his mother a musical comedy actress who was spending the last few decades of her life giving her admirers a series of farewell performances on the eves of her definite and positive retirements. As for his father—in the background lurked a dim incredulous being opening packing-cases as they were needed. Now and again he wiped his brow, now and again his eyes were troubled with retrospective nightmare. Was this portent indeed the consequence of his own paternity? Had some dynamic interloper usurped his functions? '*L'ultimo! Chi lo vuole?*' The boy seasoned his selling with a deft quotation of Neapolitan proverbs and Roman proverbs, Florentine verses and Venetian gibes, yet remained true, as so consummate a salesman should, to the kindred points of Calabria and comb.

Coming to the realization suddenly that I had already purchased six combs, and that there was no reason at all to imagine I should not purchase a seventh and an eighth if I did not break loose from the spell, I impelled myself towards a café where I had earlier discovered that they kept a prepossessing wine. I had promised myself that, sitting against the dark waters of the straits, I should salute Sicily once again, ere the night closed on me, and the dawn opened on me that led me thither. The other occupants of the café were fat spidery brigands (Calabria without her brigands so much the less Calabria) and elegant young puce-suited Fascisti. There was an air of gloom about the first and of virtuous satisfaction about the

second which I could not but attribute to a fact I gleaned from the daily paper. Mussolini, it seemed, had promised a vote of a hundred million liras for the supply of electric light throughout the province. Miserable Aspromonte ! Thrice-wretched brigands ! How could either flourish under conditions at once so artificial and so blatantly indecent ? But I was glad to feel as I filled my glass once and again (for really the wine of Calabria was even more prepossessing than I had deemed earlier that evening —a little hot and short-tempered, perhaps, yet winsome in its own way), I was glad to feel that the brigands began to shake off the load of their apprehensions. An amiable hour, or maybe two, had passed, and their eyes began to shine with all the limpid candour associated with their profession. I held before me a small paper-backed volume I had bought in Reggio, that contained the life of the most eminent of the Calabrian brigands. *Musolino, il Brigante Giustiziere*, was the title of both the book and the brigand. Gallant as Turpin, ruthless as the Ripper, he yet had graces entirely his own. It was true that the author—but his name was Schmitt—did his best to suppress them, and a regrettable anti-Calabrian bias was evident throughout his production. But I was not deceived. I knew that under the crust of Signor Schmitt's propriety lurked a suppressed brigandry dangerous as my own. As I had once felt—in Ferrara, was it not ? —that not to murder your son-in-law was a criminal omission, now I felt in Reggio that the section of my life in which I had not been a Calabrian brigand had not been lived. This night, this very night would put a period to my mis-spent youth. Yet once only before I abandoned

the career of poetry for brigandage, would I produce a poem. And if a poem, I cried, what other theme than Aspromonte? And in the end-pages of Musolino, his history, I inscribed these verses:

Having drunk wine, the poems, the countless poems
I have written in sober moods
Seem so stale, so flat, so unprofitable
As birdless and leafless woods.

Having drunk wine, I can sing of Aspromonte,
Which lies above me now, gashed with crude scars,
As a most amazing country where the moon is flowers
And thistles crack with stars.

Here no unexciting alluvial deposit
Of loose gravel and dissolute clay
Clothes the landscape. Jasper and chalcedony
Encrust the traveller's way.

No ordinary beasts on their dull duties
Pad there on listless paws,
But only salamanders and tusky mantichores
Investigate the First Cause.

If you too come, as I came, to Calabria
And drink Calabrian wine,
For you also the road will be porphyry
And mantichores' eyes shine.

But it were better you had stayed in your garden suburb,
Sir Clergyman and Novelist Miss,
If you drink milk or mineral water
In a wine's land like this.

We shall have no room for you, I and Aspromonte,
For whom wine and war ring loud,
We that are locked in desperate encounters
Aloof beyond hawk and cloud!

There the salamander no more flickers
Nor the mantichore runs his race,
Where I and Aspromonte, poet and mountain,
Are brought face to face.

And who shall prevail, mountain or poet,
Who knows? Not he nor I.
But the victor shall build for his foe worthily
A sarcophagus of lazuline sky.

III

But when I rose next morning, though I would not say I had so speedily thrown over my ambitions upon the profession of brigandage, it occurred to me that I might just as appropriately practise it in Sicily as in Calabria. I took my ticket for the ferry-boat to Messina with an air so joyous that the engaging little man behind the wicket thought it almost indecent to accept money from me. He conquered his reluctance. I stepped upon the boat humming blithely, for there was joy in the sun and in the slapping waters. Even Etna seemed more lovely than terrible. As we receded from Aspromonte, his wilder and wilder heights became visible. But there was no menace in the mountains of Sicily. In the wake of our boat narcissus was heaped upon cool beds of hyacinth. We skirted the whirlpool of Charybdis, but here too was no more movement than a wind makes

among hyacinth in leafy woods. A wind blew upon my forehead, and its texture and odour were such that Sicily and spring seemed the same word. The gull that had flown about me over inland waters and wider waters, wheeled superbly upon the tips of his wing scimitars. He had not cried so joyously above Garda's encompassing precipices nor the Adriatic lagoons nor the blue bays of Parthenope ; his wings now seemed more than ever before spiritual, woven out of no grosser substances than cloud and light :

O bird,
So lovely,
Bird with shining wings,
Wind knows you lovely,
Hence about your feet she clings,
Hence she holds your wings outspread
On her bosom as a bed.

In the morning you are but
Cloud and light embodied, shut
By the flimsiest barriers . . .

There rose the lighthouse upon the tip of the sickle that gives shelter to the shipping of Messina. We lay to against the harbour-side. I set foot in Sicily.

As we disembarked there was a shriek and squabble of boys clamouring for our luggage. They left the barrels they were rolling or sitting on, they left their gamblings in buttons and copper coins, and scuffled about us like sea-birds. But I had no luggage to attract them, and I stood unregarded, wondering whether this under foot were indeed Sicilian earth. And my eyes moved in a

sort of slow content profounder than rapture from object to object of this harbour-side furniture, coils of rope, baskets of fish, kegs of tar ; for all this was Sicilian.

And then it was that a quiet child sitting upon a box, saying no word, thinking no thought, seized my eyes. He cannot have been more than eight years old, but never have I seen outside marble or bronze a face so perfectly, so immortally, Greek. Certainly never in Greece ; no face with a single feature so classical as all of these were. No, it was not the quality of marble but of bronze, strictly of bronze. I recalled certain small busts from Herculaneum, out of that disinterred city, as I stood in this throbbing sun with the smell of brine about me and the sea slapping against the ships. I recalled particularly a bronze bust—in Munich, I think—of a youth with a riband about his hair and a thong, worked in a design of five leaves, bound across his breast from over his right shoulder. The face is far too calm, too simple almost, to be exquisite. It is so grave, so self-possessed, that it drives an anxiety deep into the heart. What am I doing ? What are all these doing ; these crowds, these buildings, these railway trains ? Whence coming ? Whither going ? Why at all ?

Every feature of this child on the quayside at Messina, that had once housed the Greeks of Samos, was on the broad even plan of the Greek bronze ; level brow, straight nose quietly modelled, the lips a trifle sensuous, a trifle cynical. The eyes were so dark, so deep-set, that the face seemed eyeless almost, precisely as the bronzes are. A certain temperance (for no feature was in itself so beautiful that the eye unduly lingered

there) held the whole together in a frame of serene loveliness.

Wandering through what devious generations, through how many tortuous histories, had not this drop of Greek blood arrived to be substantiate at last on the quayside at Messina, against a coaling-shed owned by an English company, amid a confusion of ropes and bars, rivets and barrels, a shouting in many tongues? The Sikelian had surprised his earliest encampments, but he remembered Hellas and was not subdued. The Carthaginian destroyed his cities, the Roman stole his gods, the Saracen flared like a wind out of the desert. But there was an unconquerable spirit which least of all he could himself define, a memory of calm citadels upon hill-tops, of golden islands and most golden poetry. The Norman came swiftly and went as soon. German and Spaniard—there had been clouds and these shed their rain and were forgotten. An Englishman had erected his coaling-shed upon the harbour-side of Messina. How soon would not his posterity laugh to scorn so cumbrous an enginery! Were the currents that swirled in the straits harnessed to his body's need? And now the subtle influences of the air, the action and counter-action of moon and earth, planets and earth? Hellas outlived them, being the spirit's need, wandering inexpugnable through what devious generations, through how many tortuous histories!

I found myself under the awning of the market over against the fishing-boats. Great slabs of swordfish with dusky skins and strawberry flesh lay upon the counters. Pink squids heaved upon glancing beds of mullet. There

was a busy traffic in spiny-fringed shells large as a baboon's skull. They were selling mussels blanketed with harbour-mud, and opening the shells, you squeezed lemon-juice and dexterously absorbed their occupants. I sat down on the warm stone by the water's edge and dangled my feet over Sicilian sea, then lordlily commanded that mussels should be brought me, a pan of water and countless lemons. Like the morning star dwindling out of the morning sky, my seagull lessened towards the Ionian Islands. But I—my journey sunward was ended. I was in Sicily.

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